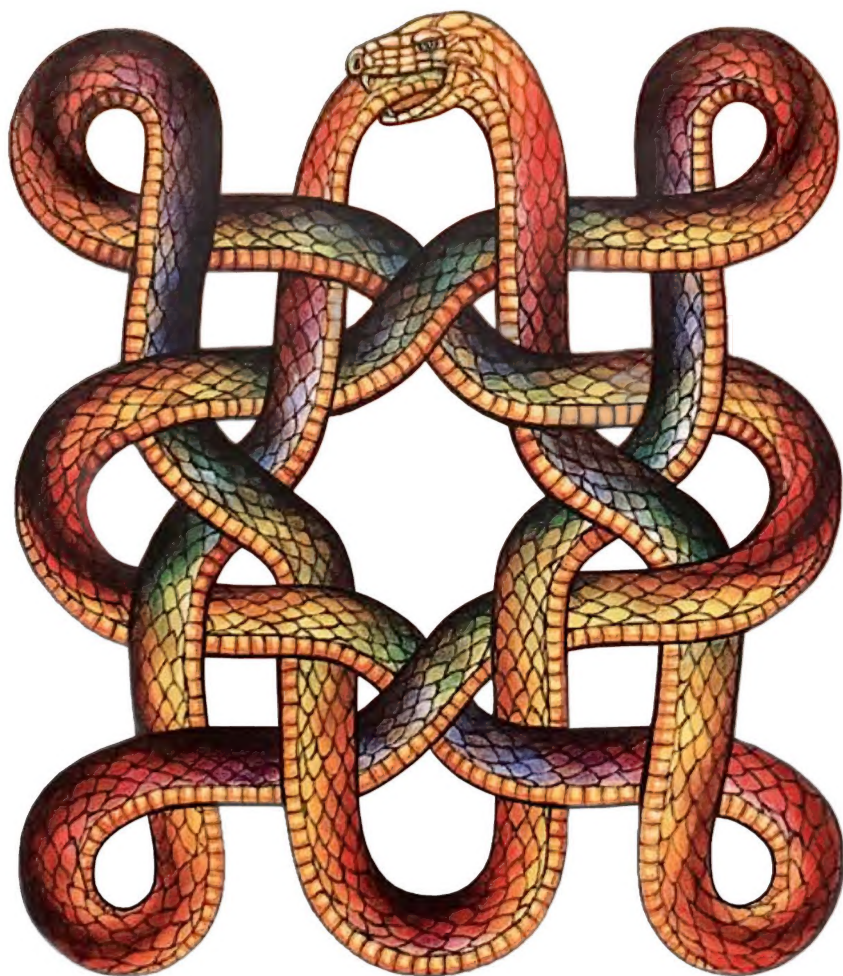


THE SERPENT OF PARADISE



MIGUEL SERRANO

The Serpent of Paradise

—

Miguel Serrano



TRADITION

THE SERPENT OF PARADISE

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A tree reaching up to heaven must
have roots reaching down to hell.

NIETZSCHE

The Serpent

The Serpent

This book is the story of a distant people and of the Serpent. These people, as vast in numbers as the serpents of the sea, have been submerged for ages in a tremendous adventure. They have allowed themselves to be bitten by the Serpent, and their adventure, which is at once mysteriously complex and divinely simple, is their search for eternity by means of poison.

* * *

A man who has married this Serpent has a strange, otherworldly appearance. His face has the repose of one who has taken pleasure in being poisoned, and he reflects the calmness of death. He appears to be immersed in dreamy waters, where he swims with the fish of God. His eyes, though closed, emanate an indescribable joy, and there is the shadow of a smile on his lips; for it has been his privilege to descend to the dark roots of pleasure and to be able to return to a spiritual union. In the palace that rests on the top of the Tree of Paradise he has met someone for whom he has been waiting for a long time, and the joy of this encounter has made tears stream down his cheeks. The fruit formed from these tears are at once liquid and icelike, and when they fall they make a noise like that of tinkling bells.

Yet the face of such a man always makes one shudder, for it is always deeply lined and harsh like a mountain crag. Indeed, I have seen such faces in the Andes.

This book, which is about a faraway people and a Serpent, is also a book about my own very special relations with the Serpent since my childhood.

The Serpent and I

Even before I became an adolescent I began to have mysterious experiences. I used to feel a strange chilling sensation that traveled along my spine and reached up to my brain. Usually these experiences took place at night, when I went to bed. In that half world between consciousness and unconsciousness I would have the feeling that a switch had been turned which made me lose all control of myself. The objects in the room where I lay would lose their equilibrium, and my ordinary relationship to them would disappear. I could see myself moving and acting at a tremendous speed, and inside my head thousands of words would gush forth at an increasing tempo. I would feel dizzy and helpless, and the only way I could escape was to fall into a deep sleep. Then I would peacefully wake up, loving life and happily conscious of the crispness of the morning.

Shortly after these experiences I was overcome by a serious illness. In the delirium of my fever it seemed to me that I would rise from my bed, and walk towards the balcony that overlooked the street from the second floor. I would then turn round and look at my bed where I could see myself lying flat on my back. In due course I recovered from my illness, but one night when I was going to sleep, or perhaps I was already partly asleep, I saw before me the face of a dark and bearded figure who was covered with furs, and who smiled at me in a familiar, ironic way. I woke up, violently trembling.

After that, the chilling sensation in my back became more and more persistent. Yet I could not talk about it with anyone. The phenomenon

simply could not be expressed in ordinary language. I could not say that invisible beings were climbing up my spine or that my brain was full of thousands of words which were being uttered at a tremendous speed.

Then one day, at dawn, the door to my room opened, and a covered figure came and sat on the foot of my bed. I could feel the weight on the mattress. As I looked at it, its cloak seemed to be falling from its head, and it seemed to be trembling with vibrations. The room felt icy cold and I lay frozen in terror. I closed my eyes so as not to see the figure, but when I opened them again it was still there, turning its head so as to hide its face. I wanted to escape, but was paralyzed. After that, although I never saw the figure again, I was often afflicted with the same feeling of immobility. It usually came at dawn, and I would feel an icy, burning vibration in my feet, which would rise along my spine and spread to the various parts of my body. These would then vibrate like bells from another world, and I would lie still on my bed, neither asleep nor able to wake up. With all my strength I would try to wake up or to move, but something inside would push me down towards regions of infinite shadows, towards a fearful nothingness, and I would feel as though I were on the verge of death.

All of these incidents occurred entirely out of time. Even now, after so many years, I can feel them more acutely than the things that happened yesterday. They are like stories that have ramifications on different levels. It is of course true that experiences of this kind happen only infrequently. But they never blend or mix like the events of this world. Rather they accumulate, like a series of timeless memories which function as signals marking our destinies and the progress of our fates.

Sometimes it is necessary to choose between the temporal life and the atemporal life. But, since neither can be entirely overcome, the very act of choice may uncover the point of equilibrium between the two, insofar as it shows where one penetrates the other.

Intuitively I feel that at the heart of one's being, everything is ageless and unchanging.

When the Disciple Is Prepared the Master Appears

It would take me a long time to explain how it was that I came into the presence of the Master. The old phrase gives the essence of the case: "When the disciple is prepared, the Master appears." That at least is what happened to me, although I don't yet know whether it was for good or for ill.

The Master's eyes are blue, and his manners are courtly and antique. When he speaks of life he speaks of an age that has long since passed away. Only when he goes to other realities does he transcend time.

When I first met him I observed him clearly, and with a critical mind. But in fact I could not be too critical, for I was concerned with the problem of death. I therefore began not with a statement but with a question. His reply was strange: he told me that what had happened was that I had entered into relations with the Serpent.

Then the Master began to tell me about the Serpent. "The Serpent," he said, "was coiled about the Tree of Paradise, as well as about the dorsal spine. . . . By some it is called Kundalini; by others the Astral Fire. . . ."

This message was not spoken; what the Master did was to sing.

I spent a year with the Master in hopes of being accepted. I was one of a group that surrounded him. The Order we formed was rumored to have come from India, or perhaps from Tibet. It acted in accordance with signs only: its purpose was to concentrate on cosmic vibrations, and it acted in accordance with those rules of conduct that emanated from the Ice Age, and which were then lost when the continent of

Atlantis was submerged. An ancient Himalayan order was said to have preserved this prehuman wisdom. This order was not one of saints or of mystics, but of warriors who proposed to take eternity by assault.

Then the day came when the Master unsheathed his sword and touched my shoulder with it, while the others stood around me also holding their swords. Afterwards I was given the first sign, which was supposed to open the doors to another plane, releasing me from the bondage of my body. That night I traced the sign over my heart, and with my finger I drew a circle around it. At that time, and ever since when I have drawn the sign, I experienced the same vibrations I had known before, so that the sign seemed to be confirmed by invisible powers.

The Master had told me not to resist when the fainting spells occurred, but to give in to them. "You will have to fight the Serpent without fear," he said. "You will have to crush the Serpent with the sign you now possess." Thus, at the hour when my fainting spell usually occurred, I let myself go. My body seemed to turn to lead, and then, after a brief moment of nothingness, of total darkness and forgetfulness, I seemed to fall, revolving at an incredible speed down into a bottomless well. Finally I reached the bottom, which seemed like a region of hell, or an inferno. I did not remember to trace the sign, but gave myself up in total despair. Then, somehow, I seemed to rise, until I found myself in an empty region where I apparently floated. There I seemed entirely free and happy. But when I woke up again and found myself on my bed, that moment of indescribable peace was gone, and I felt that I was really buried alive in my own body.

Afterwards I wondered whether something had gone wrong. I tried to induce the same experience artificially, but the phenomenon would only come naturally. The Master interpreted the signs for me, but I never really understood them. I was looking for a guide as precise as a street map, and it was to be years before I overcame these rational desires.

During my dawn fainting spells I would sometimes try to direct the process and to control its sequence. The result was always cata-

strophic, however; for while part of me was in one realm the other part was in another, and the two always clashed violently. With my conscious ego awake in the middle of the process, I would remain in a halfway or neutral state. The vibrations which had begun to rise from my feet would begin to distribute themselves about my body, but the terrible music would never reach my brain, because there I was conscious and trying to hold on to daily reality. And so I would be caught between two worlds, unable to experience either satisfactorily. All I could do to escape from the vibrations was to stretch out one arm, and then the other until I was able to sit on the edge of the bed. Finally, with great difficulty, I would begin to move my legs until I could stand up. I would then move forwards without ever looking back, because I knew if I did, *everything would be lost*. I would go to the door and open it; then I would cross the room and walk out onto my balcony and let myself fall. I would also go and visit other people asleep in neighboring rooms. These experiences occurred frequently, but they were never completely satisfactory. Nothing seemed entirely real, and I felt as though my development was being stultified. I lived alone, isolated in a world of ghosts and signs, noises and echoes. When the vibrations began I was prepared to face them, but always remained in a halfway state of torment.

Sometime later I was overcome by an even more startling sensation. The Master had given me a new sign, which was an indication that I had risen in the hierarchy of the Order. That night I traced this sign on my chest, and at dawn the vibrations began again, but this time they were so violent that I thought I could not survive them. My vision seemed to be infested with bloody spots, and I prepared for the end. Then, suddenly, a jug appeared in the air before me. Instinctively I put out my hands and poured its contents over my body. The fire of the vibrations instantly ceased.

Afterwards I asked myself what had happened. Who had put the water there? Who had come to my help at that moment? Was this also a subjective phenomenon? I asked the Master, but he never explained it to me.

All these experiences occurred many years ago, but the results have never completely disappeared. My body continues in its course towards ultimate destruction, but I am always ready to embark into the world of illusion.

My Master has always lived in this world of archetypes: he has dreamed extrahuman things and he is the prisoner of gigantic myths. He is dear to me because he never had the mystic complacency of the mentally soft. For him adventures in the world beyond have always been acts of war, and there has never been a truce.

One day my Master called me to his private study. He was sitting with an open book on his knee. He asked me to approach, and pointed to a picture in this book which depicted a very high mountain with two lesser ones beside it. "That is Mount Kailas," he said. "The main chapter of our Order lives there, somewhere in the interior of this mountain, in a cave. The mountain itself is in the Himalayas, not far from the frontier between Tibet and India. Near the mountain is a sacred lake called Manasarovar, and on the other side is the Tibetan village of Dahripu. Mount Kailas is sacred for both Hindus and Buddhists."

At that time the Master had begun to paint pictures of Mount Kailas all over the walls of his room. He thought he had discovered the definitive source of our Order, and he claimed that this place ruled over the spirit of the Orient and preserved the wisdom that had been forgotten in the West.

As I listened to the Master, I began to realize that if the truth was really kept in one place I should have to go and find it myself.

The Search

The Serpent Is Hermaphroditic

I arrived in Bombay on a summer day many years ago and began my pilgrimage immediately. In the harbor across from the city lies the island of Elephanta with its famous cave, which was carved by the Brahmans during the sixth century.

There is something about this cave which suggests that it must have been fashioned by supernatural architects. It can be reached only by climbing up through thick shrubbery, and it has four entrances of which the principal one leads directly to a sublime figure, the Trimurti, which is a gigantic three-headed statue of Siva, carved out of the rear wall. Each of the three heads looks in a set direction but at no particular object, for the eyes of each are closed, and the god seems to be dreaming or meditating over something that is happening internally. He seems to be contemplating the ecstasy of creation. With the eyes that see nothing the Trimurti sees everything; closed to the outside world, these eyes contemplate essences only. And the faces of the statue reflect a profound enjoyment of what is being contemplated.

Right beside the Trimurti is another figure of Siva, this one a full figure. In the Hindu trilogy Siva is supposed to represent destruction; Brahma is the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver. Yet these classifications should not be too rigidly adhered to, for each god in his way represents all three. One is the All and the All is One. So Siva also creates and preserves. As Nataraya, for example, he dances in the center of the fire that destroys the worlds, but he does so only to make room for a new cycle of creation.

In this statue, Siva appears as the complete god. No longer a divine form of particularities, he is a total god. Indeed he is both god and goddess, for this statue shows the god as being half male and half female. The female breast carved in the rock is a sign of the line between light and darkness in the god.

Thus as Siva is androgynous, so god as a whole is hermaphroditic. A single sex would be impossible, for the closed eyes of the Trimurti are turned inward towards that palace where someone has found somebody else after an eternity of waiting. And the joy of this encounter is expressed in the faces of the Trimurti, with their quiet smiles of ineffable happiness. What they see and experience is the divine orgasm of a god that has at last become reunited with himself.

But to reach this last stage, to climb up and reach the Palace on top of the Tree, it is first necessary to descend to the roots where the Serpent sleeps in a coil. Only when the Serpent is liberated at the foot of the Tree so that it may climb along that dorsal spine, sprouting its fiery wings, will an understanding of the mystery be possible.

That is the secret of Elephanta.

Old Delhi

At length I decided to settle in Old Delhi. The house I found contained three rooms and a small garden. The main room, which also served as my bedroom, was surrounded by windows through which the dense tropical vegetation, banana and fig trees, could be seen. My gayest visitors were the monkeys. They leaped about, destroying everything they touched. It was impossible to make the watchman frighten them away, for the monkey is a sacred animal. He is the living image of Hanuman, the monkey king who helped Rama rescue his wife Sita from the claws of the demon Ravana.

Near my house was a quarter exclusively inhabited by the *harijans*, people whose name means God's children, and they are employed as house-sweepers and as washermen. I could often hear their songs coming from the open-air laundry, accompanied by the flat sound of wet clothes beaten against the stone.

Crossing the street, and passing through a park full of ruined mosques, you come to the river. This is the Jumna, which is as sacred as the Ganges. When it overflows with the rains of the monsoon, it so endangers the villages along its banks that the inhabitants fill their caravans with their household goods and come to Old Delhi, where they camp in its old squares and streets. Meanwhile, on the surface of the turbulent river float the corpses of dead animals and snakes.

Along the *ghats* of the Jumna, the dead are burned to the accompaniment of floral tributes. There are also hundreds of small temples along the river banks where the faithful congregate, and where

trumpets and bells ring out to the creative power of the lingam, or phallus, of Siva. Nearby there is also a stadium, where men glistening with oil and wearing loincloths engage in wrestling matches. At a little distance away there is also a small *ashram*, or convent, dedicated to Krishna, the god of love and of music. On Sunday afternoons it becomes a meeting place for all sorts of men: merchants and pilgrims, beggars and saints. There they gather to sing to the god and to recount his legends and miracles. The music begins slowly, but its rhythm gradually increases until it becomes frenzied. It also has a hypnotic quality which makes the singers lose themselves in trances.

Except for a few people who come every Sunday, the public consists of an ever-changing band of vagabonds. The singing is also improvised. One day I saw a poor woman arise and prostrate herself before the image of the god, touching the floor with her head. Then she began to laugh and to cry. As the music continued, she almost seemed to leave the world, and she no longer laughed and cried alternately, but did both at once. Her face became transfigured, so that she looked like a dead person who had mysteriously managed to keep on living.

On one occasion I remember seeing an old man take up a small musical instrument that looked like an accordion and begin to sing. Soon he had ceased to be an old man, but became transformed into the very god whose legend entranced the audience. He was singing about the childhood of Krishna, telling about his adventures with the *gopis* and about the times when he danced and played the flute. As the old man continued to sing, the others began to join in, and soon everyone present had caught something of his ecstasy. The biblical beard of the old man moved up and down as he sang, and it seemed as though the god Krishna himself was dancing before us.

The chief personage of this *ashram* is an extremely old man, and the people who come to the Sunday ceremonies even claim that he is well over a hundred years old. While that is unlikely, he is certainly very ancient, and he never wears more than a loincloth, even in the coldest winter months. He never attends the musical sessions, but always remains in his retreat, sitting with his legs crossed in meditation. Only on rare occasions have I seen him present among the

singers, and then only when the music has reached its climax. Then he sits quietly, with his long hair neatly braided and with an expression of indestructible peace on his beautiful face. As the singing reaches its height, the participants begin to throw rose petals into the air in time with the music. Many fall near this old man, and it is almost as though they were throwing their petals at a living god. On several occasions I went to sit by this old man in his retreat, remaining with him in total silence, trying to "listen" to his meditations and to meditate myself.

Old Delhi contains many secret things like this; it also has that phantasmagoric street, Chandni Chowk.

* * *

Chandni Chowk is the vibrating commercial artery of Old Delhi. At all hours of the day multitudes move up and down its length, and in the evening it is illuminated by colored lights. There one can see automobiles, horse carts, trams, trucks, bicycles, tongas, rickshaws, pedestrians, soldiers, bands of musicians, processions, weddings, elephants, camels, cows, beggars and people dying in the street. It is a variegated and monstrous universe. The sidewalks are covered with the stalls of vendors, and the street itself is lined by flower shops, sweetshops, food shops, banks, antique shops, cinemas and temples. The richer merchants, dressed in white cloth, sit on the floor of their shops among brightly colored saris, woven with gold and silver thread, which they hope will attract the attention of India's beautiful women.

Hundreds of lateral streets lead off the Chandni Chowk. These are so narrow that the balconies of the buildings on either side touch one another. Trees are planted in the middle of the street, and their branches and roots penetrate into the houses.

What is most attractive about this quarter is the colorfulness of the shops. In these, everything seems to be in tune, and the flower shops are always surrounded by people. These contain garlands of jasmine and roses, which are worn by priests and used to decorate women's hair. The whole street is filled with the perfume of these yellow, red,

white, and orange flowers. In other places, colored pastes are sold, which are used to paint magic circles on holy places and on the thresholds of temples and houses. Sandalwood pastes are used to adorn the eyes and horns of cows, and to paint the little dot that appears on women's foreheads. In one of the crowded streets, only Indian spices are sold. These are piled in open baskets in stalls along the street, and the aroma of clove and pepper, of cinnamon, aliche, and betel mixes strangely with the smell of the multitudes that pass by.

The perfume shops are full of sandalwood sticks and of incenses which are burned in nearly every building in Old Delhi. They also sell boxes containing glass balls of scent. There are dozens of Indian perfumes, but most of them do not please Westerners because of their penetrating and almost savage sweetness. One is called *hinna* and has a dark, heavy smell that penetrates the senses and intoxicates the soul. It is especially recommended during the time of the monsoon, and is also placed on the neck, nipples, and sexual organs of brides. Those who use this perfume are said to overcome time: when they take two steps in this world, they take a third in the other.

This quarter is also famous for a strange group of beings who live there. Wearing feminine clothes, tight blouses or saris, they go about in groups of two or three. Their hair is loose, and they walk with a mincing step. The popular belief is that they are sexless, but the truth is that they are men. They are musicians, and carry drums and tambourines which they hang by ribbons from their necks; they also have flutes and bells. Some of them have false breasts, whose shape is visible under their silk blouses. But nobody worries about them, and they go about freely; they attract a certain curiosity, and by many they are looked upon with reverence. It is hard to describe their eyes; they have something about them that is proud and cynical, in curious contrast to the soft, undulating movements of their arms and legs.

* * *

Every year, at the end of October, the processions of Rama pass down the Chandni Chowk, in celebration of his victory over the

demon Ravana. And in Delhi, as in every city of India, scenes from the Ramayana are presented in the town squares. These performances are accompanied by music and dances, and the movements of the actors are always slow and liturgical, as if they were reenacting a legendary dream. The old story is recounted to the accompaniment of ancient songs, and at the end of the great festivities, in the crowded squares of the cities, enormous effigies of Ravana and his followers are burned.

In Old Delhi, the Rama processions are particularly interesting. They consist of a number of floats, carrying Rama and Sita, Hanuman and his court of monkeys and Ravana and his soldiers. As the procession moves down the Chandni Chowk the ancient war is reenacted, and arrows and spears are shot from float to float.

The procession along the Chandni Chowk is unbelievably gorgeous. First come dozens of elephants, bedecked with gold and silver ornaments and covered with rich brocades. Then come lampbearers, sword dancers, fakirs, jugglers, and magicians singing incantations. The actors who represent the gods are priestly, and they almost seem to have become divine. They wear crowns of fruit, and are decorated with collars of vine leaves and jungle flowers. They have artificially arched eyebrows which make their eyes look deep set, and their faces are painted blue.

Then suddenly the fire dance begins. This dance is performed by young boys wearing artificial breasts, who are known as the hermaphrodite dancers. Their dance begins slowly and insinuatingly as they swing their breasts and their hips, but gradually, as the rhythm of the great drums increases, they reach a state of frenzy. Their eyes sparkle, their naked feet hit the dusty asphalt and their metal bracelets tinkle. In their hands they have been carrying lighted torches, and when they enter their trance they push the fire into their mouths, they jump over it, they step on it, they embrace it, and they eat it—all before the serene and quiet eyes of the spectators. These hermaphrodites have performed this dance since childhood, and so they have long been accustomed to fire. Trained by their fellow tribesmen, they have earned a good deal of respect and prestige from their dancing. But there is also

something disturbing and sad about this spectacle, for these boys have not attained peace. The external fire they brandish is not capable of melting the opposites they represent. There is a great difference between the hermaphrodite god of Elephanta and the hermaphrodite boys of Chandni Chowk. Whereas the first has overcome his manhood, the latter have negated theirs.

I have often found myself in the midst of these processions that advance through the fabulous night, exuding these mysterious and lethal smells. And as I walked along with them I began to forget who I was, and I didn't care where I was going. Indeed, I began to doubt whether I would ever be able to return to my own country.

* * *

Walking down these Indian streets is like entering a dream. Carts, trams, and cyclists seem to exist on an astral plane, for none of these thousands of vehicles ever collide. Cyclists and rickshaws avoid each other by sudden movements, and everything is silent, as in a dream. I have sometimes wondered whether the scene before me was actually real, or whether it was some pale reflection of life on another planet. Sometimes I have felt an almost irresistible temptation to let myself be hit by one of these vehicles, for I was certain that it would pass through me without damaging me.

Misery has the same fantastic quality in India. The poverty that one sees in the Chandni Chowk or in the railway station of Old Delhi seems almost unreal. All along the street, beggars and sick and dying people wander into the traffic, and what is seen daily in Old Delhi surpasses the imagination. Totally naked men and women, lying on the pavement and covered with flies and ants, are utterly ignored by the priests and rich merchants who pass by. Death and destruction is everywhere evident. Men mutilated by syphilis or leprosy go along the sidewalks, stepping in their own urine, and displaying their open red wounds. Some are deformed monsters, without faces or arms, and some have no legs. For several consecutive days I saw a woman crawling along the pavement to spend the night in the street not far from my

house. She would talk to herself, hurl insults, and strike out at phantoms. She was covered with rags, and every day she died a little more. In another section of Old Delhi, on the grass before the Red Fort, I saw a naked man lying on his back. He was black-skinned and had an erection; moreover, flies and small spiders were crawling over him. Yet only a little distance away, little boys and girls were whirling about and dancing.

At nighttime the misery of India reaches its height. Men and women who no longer seem human sit in their own excrement, eat dead flesh, and cluster together on the hard pavement. In the winter many of them freeze and die.

Yet the ordinary Hindu is quite indifferent to all this misery. Nobody helps anyone, and nobody seriously asks help from anyone else. The beggar asks for alms automatically, and he never says thank you. Here alone we see the philosophic basis for Hindu misery that distinguishes it from that of other countries. For it is the beggar who does the favor by asking, since he offers the giver a chance to improve his destiny. Yet, at bottom, the Hindu doubts the propriety of saving those who are dying in the streets. It is not that he does not love these people; it is because he is not sure whether help is what the dying man wants or needs, since he has to fulfill his *karma* and endure his present incarnation. To interfere may be more dangerous than to let the dying man's destiny take its course. The concept of charity therefore does not belong in this ancient country; it flourishes only in young countries. Neither the beggar nor the dying man expects it. Their fate rests on the Wheel of Fortune, for tomorrow they will be rich, and today's rich man will be poor. Everything is relative; everything is illusory.

Thus I have never been able to get rid of the curious suspicion that the misery I see about me in India is almost comic, because it is so exaggerated. Certainly this misery is not depraved; indeed it contains an element of religious joy. In other words, thanks to the religious concept of Hinduism, misery itself provides mental peace. Even those miserable people who writhe in urine by the latrines have a profound

look of peace on their faces. This beautiful and spiritual look is the mark of a different race. It is the sign of a people who have lost everything, yet who have been saved by the gods.

A complementary feature of this is that in India nobody is ever bored. The atmosphere of the streets is spiritual; it is almost cosmic, as if everything there were merely the reflection of another planet. There is flux and movement, but there is also peace, and this peace has not yet been lost.

One day I saw a man pulling a small cart. This cart had wheels, and inside it was a small thing, a body without legs, nothing more than a naked bust with arms that stopped at the wrists. It was a woman. Her breasts were eaten by leprosy and so was a part of her face. Her hair was disorderly, and the color of her skin was bluish black, which is a sign of incurable leprosy. Nevertheless, she had deep and peaceful eyes, and when she passed by me she only smiled; she asked me for nothing. But that smile was so tremendous, and so feminine, that I confess I felt an attraction for that thing, that woman-thing. The essence of the feminine spirit was still there, untouched by the ravages of her leprosy. The man who was pulling the cart walked along insensibly, looking vaguely ahead. He too was bluish black and clearly was touched by leprosy.

Mother and Lover

For years I had heard of Ananda Mai, who is known as the Mother. Before coming to India, I had read of her life and had heard of her mystic powers. Her peacefulness and happiness are legendary, and it is said of her that she had completely overcome her individual ego and attained the mystic center of existence.

One day, very early in the morning, I left for Dehra Dun, where Ananda Mai has one of her principal *ashrams*. In the summertime the Mother goes either to Dehra Dun or to Almora, which is in the mountains. During the wintertime she lives in Banaras. Like Rabindranath Tagore, and like Rama Krishna and Vivekananda, she originally came from Bengal. In the June dawn the sun had barely risen, and it had a tremulous aura about it, as though it were separated from us by another zone of light. The road over which I was traveling, and the northern scenery about me, all seemed to be affected by this nightmarish, astral light. Caravans of men and camels were passing along the roads, and already the atmosphere had grown hot. Yet this heat did not come from the light; rather it seemed to antecede it, like the world before the coming of light. For, after all, light can also be cold. Thus the light was only important psychologically, and on that June day it was grey and sad. The heat, by contrast, was entirely external; it burned up the nonessentials until only the essentials remained. As a result I had the sensation not of walking over a road, but of going in search of the Mother by first searching my own soul. Nevertheless, the heat was

fatiguing, and although I had closed my eyes as I approached Dehra Dun, in order to concentrate on the Mother, I could see only camels and caravans, animals and men. This external scenery kept on repeating itself in my mind, and although it was arid and vast it also had a certain delicacy and fineness. There was nothing romantic or sentimental about it; it was too serious and transcendental for that.

Finally, after passing through a shady forest full of fig trees, I found myself near the *ashram* of the Mother. It was a house like any other house, and it stood beside the road that continues onward towards the Himalayan village of Musoorie. The entrances of the house were garlanded with flowers, and from the interior came the sound of music, mainly of drums and wind instruments. Inside, people were singing, and crowds of other people were gathered in the vicinity outside. There were men wearing the saffron robes of beggars; some were half naked and had ascetic faces and brightly shining eyes. There were also groups of women who had gathered in separate areas. New visitors constantly came and went; they arrived bearing fruits and garlands, and they left with their hands pressed together and with their faces bowed.

Since it was so crowded, I decided not to try to enter the hall, but to look for a secluded place from which I could observe the proceedings. I went over to one side and sat by a young man who had a reddish beard, and hair that had grown down over his shoulders. He was very thin, and he watched the scene before him with half-closed eyes. The hall itself was full of people, and, while the chants were sung, rose petals were thrown into the air and onto the seated figure of the Mother. As new groups of people entered, they knelt down and prostrated themselves at her feet, giving her fruit, flowers, and other presents. She bent over to touch their heads, took the garlands and returned the fruit; and then the pilgrims went away, looking happy and refreshed.

The Mother was dressed in a white sari which contrasted sharply with her dark forearms, which were encircled with simple bracelets. Her black hair was tied tightly at her neck, and her deep eyes appeared to be large and dark. She smiled frequently, and when she spoke

her voice sounded immensely attractive. Her laughter was musical, almost sensual in its tone. I then began to realize with a shock of surprise how profoundly feminine the Mother was. She seemed to be speaking of God in an astonishingly coquettish manner. I watched her discussing abstract themes with two Brahmans who had come to consult her, but she disarmed them with a smile in the middle of a sentence, and with a laugh between two syllogisms. What she was saying was serious and in accord with the Vedanta and with the sacred texts, but her accents and gestures were as seductive as any that I had seen in any woman. I wondered how old she was: sixty, seventy, thirty or twenty. It was impossible to guess, for Ananda Mai seemed to be ageless. Inside the house it was terribly hot, and her disciples tried to refresh her with big fans made of matting. At length the Mother lifted her naked arms and loosened her hair so that it fell over her shoulders like a black cascade. Then for a moment she looked deeply at me. Her glance was so seductive that I felt a strong physical attraction to her. I tried hard to suppress this feeling, however, for I was afraid of committing a sacrilege, and was worried that she, with her hypersensitivity, might have felt the strength of my reaction. But perhaps the same thing happens to everyone, for when I looked at my bearded companion I noticed that he was glancing at me with a faint smile of complicity.

Then the Mother began to sing; and then, as suddenly, she stopped. She merely sat like an immobile statue, while everything around her gradually stopped moving. The drums, the wind instruments, and the little silver bells all became silent. Even the disciples stopped fanning her. In the meantime the Mother simply sat there in the center of the hall, with her legs crossed and her hair fallen over her shoulders. Her eyes were closed, and she began to look old. I found myself witnessing an astonishing transformation, for that woman, who only a moment before had been ageless and seductive, had stopped being a woman and had become sexless. I then looked at her hands: they were the same, for she was wearing the same simple bracelets and her hands seemed quiet and serene. But something fundamental had changed,

and those hands were really no longer the same. Moreover, the hair hanging down to her shoulders was no longer a woman's hair, and her skin seemed to have become pallid and flat. Certainly it would have been impossible to feel attraction for that clump of hair and fingers, or for those hard, stony lips. For by then she had begun to look like the sphinx, and her face looked almost dead. Yet, at that very moment, an astonishing peacefulness began to spread over her face. The tenseness of the previous moment, which had been heightened by cross-currents of perfume and by love and passion, had now been resolved, and peace had taken its place. In that moment of quietness it was almost possible to hear the heartbeats of the multitudes assembled all around, and I myself could feel the peace that came from contemplating that stonelike face, which said nothing and which incited no passion. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of gratitude for the Mother, who had suddenly taken me away from the tortures of Samsara. Without having to turn my face, I realized that my neighbor had felt the same sensation.

How long this trance lasted is impossible to say, but at any rate, after a faint tremor, the Mother returned to herself, and came back to earth. As she opened her eyes her pupils seemed to be still observing another sphere, but little by little they began to shine. Then the fans once again started to move, and the music also started up, chanting in praise for the return of the Mother, and for the return of her beautiful body. In a little while she would again start to spread the perfumes of Maya, and to instruct her disciples in the doctrine of Samsara. Yet, in less than an hour, I had accompanied her along that stony path, from the ocean of pain and pleasure to the nothingness of Nirvana, and then had returned to the next stage, brought there by the wheel of reincarnation. The Mother again began to laugh and to sing with her musical and agelessly feminine voice.

After a while the Mother retired, for it was mealtime in the *ashram*. My companion touched me on the shoulder, inviting me to follow him along some corridors, where a number of men and women were sitting in separate rows. He was not an Indian, but a Frenchman from Alsace. He told me that he had been at a number of *ashrams*, but that he had

finally decided to stay with the Mother. He felt sure that he would be able to find peace there. When we sat down he taught me how to eat in the Indian way. On the floor there were banana leaves, which had been washed in running water. Then a barefoot monk passed along the rows with a large container from which he scooped a mixture of rice and vegetables, called *dahal*, onto the leaves. There were no knives and forks: all eating was done with the hands. But only the right hand was used, as is prescribed in the Vedas. I was instructed to take the food between my fingers, to make a small ball of it, and to push it into my mouth with my thumb. As a beginner, I found it difficult to eat on the floor with my legs crossed. Later on I joined a queue which led up to a place where another monk was pouring water over the hands of those who had just finished eating. A number of the pilgrims were gargling and rinsing out their mouths.

Since it was midday, the sun was mercilessly hot, and as a result most of the men withdrew into small cells, or rooms, where they took their rest. My new friend, the Frenchman, left me in one of these rooms, where I found that a place had been left for me on the floor. Taking off my shirt, I lay down and closed my eyes, hoping to sleep. I went off for a moment and had a brief dream about treetops. But then I woke up again because it was so hot. Later I began to feel groggy, and the hours seemed to pass in a nebulous fashion. Then, perhaps because of the hardness of the floor, I once again opened my eyes. By my side I found a man fanning me. His fan was made of wet mats, and the breeze he made seemed to smell faintly of sandalwood. Over in a corner someone else was reciting prayers in Sanskrit. The man by my side had a broad face, and he smiled when he saw me open my eyes. On the other side I found an invalid, half lying on the floor. He began to speak to me and to tell me about an accident that he had suffered years ago. He had broken his back, and all the doctors he had consulted had told him that his case was hopeless. But the Mother had made him feel better. She had also told him that he was going to live. This man then strapped up his chest with belts, and had someone insert canes down his back so as to keep him erect.

I was then told that I would be received by the Mother at four

o'clock. I therefore washed my face with cold water and went down the corridor towards a small room. The Frenchman was already there, and another young man wearing a *dhosi*, but with a bare torso, sat on the floor. The Mother was resting on a platform covered with a white sheet and pillows. Next to her was a very old woman with a shaven head, who was wearing a saffron-colored gown. Her hands and feet were so small that she almost seemed to be a mummy. She was in fact Ananda Mai's mother.

I bowed in the ceremonial way I had seen others use, and placed a garland of flowers I had brought for her at her feet. The Mother smiled and gave me an apple. Ananda Mai can speak only Bengali and Hindi, and therefore she had a young man near her to act as interpreter. Her first words were:

"I saw you come in this morning. Did you notice? Yesterday afternoon I had been thinking of my brother who died when I was only a small girl. He looked very much like you, and this morning, when I saw you, I thought you were my brother."

I listened to these words with surprise, and those present looked at me and smiled. Then, moved by an impulse, I took a small bag made of golden brocade, which I had always carried over my breast, and placed it in her hands. This bag contained relics and they were sacred to me. The Mother took my small bag carefully, almost as if she were somewhat afraid to. I then asked her if any life existed beyond this life, and whether it would be possible to join those who had already departed. She then looked at me quietly and answered, "Such things are possible, in dreams. . . ."

The Great Ego

From Dehra Dun I continued on to Musoorie and Rishikesh, passing through thick forests and groves of mango trees. Everywhere there were monkeys jumping about, and I noticed that the baby monkeys clung onto the bellies of their mothers as they climbed up the vines and branches of the trees. The roadway passed through gentle valleys until it reached Rishikesh, a village lying on the bank of the sacred Ganges, which in these northern parts is wide and clear. Rishikesh is a very small place, largely inhabited by pilgrims and *saddhus*. It is the point of departure for caravans of pilgrims going in search of holy places. It is also the gateway to Uttarkashi and Gangotri, which is the source from which the Ganges flows, and for Badrinath and Kedarnath, which are high mountains in the Himalayas and considered to be the abode of Vishnu and Siva. High up there in the snows, despite the freezing weather, there is always fire burning: it is an inextinguishable flame, representing the eternal wedding of Siva and his consort.

Soon after arriving at Rishikesh I decided to visit the *ashram* belonging to the Swami Sivananda. I had heard that this man had traveled to Mount Kailas some years ago, and I had also heard many stories and rumors about him. Originally from the south, from Madras, he had once been a doctor in Malaya, but he renounced his family life and his profession in order to withdraw to the Himalayas. There he founded his *ashram*, or monastery, which he called the Forest University or the Divine Life Society. He has lived in this place ever since, sur-

rounded by his disciples and by the monkeys who play in the forest. His *ashram* has a gymnasium for physical yoga, a photographic laboratory, a press, a hospital, a maternity ward, and a school. The rooms where the swami lives are in the lower part of the building, near the river. On the other side of the river there is a modern temple called the Gita Bhavan, while farther upstream, and also on the opposite shore, is a smaller and older temple, the Lashman Jhula.

It was still very early in the morning when I arrived, and along the roadside were many monks wearing saffron robes. Some were covered with ashes and had their hair hardened with cow dung, while others had their heads shaved. They were all going to the Ganges for their morning ablutions, and on the way they presented their beggars' bowls at the doors of houses. The approach to Sivananda's *ashram* consisted of a flight of stone steps, and even there, in the early-morning sun, the air was like that of an oven. Nevertheless, the staircase was crowded with monks and beggars and visitors who had come from other cities. At the top of the steps I asked where I should go, and was shown to a cell overlooking some lower terraces. From there I was directed to ask for the Swami Sidananda, who is the *ashram's* secretary.

I approached the door of the cell and knocked. Inside I could hear the sound of an interminable litany being repeated in Sanskrit at a great rate of speed. Then the door opened, and a young man appeared: he was barefoot, his head was shaven, and he wore only a saffron skirt, which hung from his waist. Across his chest was stretched the white string which signified that he was a Brahman. His opening of the door had not made him interrupt his litany, however, for he continued to recite the holy words. Instead, he smiled and nodded his head insistently. I told him why I had come, and he then led me into a low room where there were other young men like himself sitting in a line. He asked me to wait there, since the Swami Sivananda would not be available for an hour or so.

As the morning sun rose, the heat increased in intensity, and the atmosphere of the room grew heavy. Then, after what seemed to be a long time, people began to collect in the room, and at about eleven

o'clock the Swami Sivananda appeared. He was a large man and, like the others, was naked except for his saffron skirt. His head was also shaven. He then sat down in an armchair and glanced in my direction. He had a gentlemanly bearing; his hands were well formed, and his smile was portly and affable. We remained, however, in total silence: he asked me nothing, and I too said nothing. He simply smiled, and then, after a little while, he began to hum and to sing. His voice was beautiful and his song joyful. Then, some moments later, another swami entered, playing a chord instrument with which he accompanied Sivananda's song. When they finished Sivananda explained that the song was a yoga song of Divine Life. He then spoke of another type of yoga, capable of curing illnesses by means of the vibrations that rise from musical instruments or which emanate from the vocal cords. To demonstrate this power Sivananda then asked another yogi to sit down beside me. I was told to place my hand on the top of his shaven head. He then uttered a sound that vibrated precisely where my hand was, so that I could easily feel it. Afterwards, with another sound, he made the muscles of his forearm vibrate; then his biceps and his stomach. Yet another sound moved his ears. Finally he began to sing, and was accompanied by the Swami Sivananda.

In this way our interview concluded. Sivananda rose to leave, giving me a gracious bow. Although I had no way of knowing who he was, or what truth he claimed to profess, I felt that he was agreeable and that he was a great gentleman. This was his fundamental character. His whole bearing demonstrated this quality; moreover, he had sung me a song of joy.

Outside in the corridor I was approached by a young boy who told me that his name was Agarwati, and that he had been assigned by Swami Sivananda to accompany me on a tour of the surroundings of the *ashram*. After leaving the building we walked together along the dusty road that led towards the bridge and the Lashman Jhula. This bridge was some distance away, and when we reached it we found a man wearing Tibetan clothes standing on it. He was staring fixedly at the river, talking to it, and throwing bits of food into it. Apparently he had just received food from his begging, but before satisfying his

own hunger he was giving a portion of it to the sacred Ganges. He also had an old book from which he was reading to the river. When he turned his face he revealed black fiery eyes and a pointed beard. He had probably just crossed over the high mountain ranges from his own country, for his clothes seemed ill suited to this lower region.

Continuing on our pilgrimage, we reached an *ashram* dedicated to Kali. There we found naked men who were covering themselves with ashes. They looked like savages from the stone age or inhabitants of some other planet, but they paid no attention to us. Agarwati then told me he wanted to take me to the Gita Bhawan and to show me the small temples along the way. He also said I should see the great banyan trees and the fig trees of Buddha, and the monkeys in the neighboring jungles, because it was there that Swami Sivananda had meditated for years before founding the *ashram* of Divine Life. Agarwati also pointed out an old tree under which a holy man had lived for years; this man was reputed to have had great powers, but he had gone away to live in the mountains.

By that time the heat of the day had grown so oppressive that I had to take off my shirt. We plodded on slowly, and shortly after noon we finally reached the Gita Bhawan, which is an enormous modern temple. Agarwati had told me that he wanted me to see another swami who lived here, but who had originally come from the south. He occupied a subterranean cell in the basement of the monastery. Every year Gita Bhawan is visited by thousands of pilgrims. Its walls are covered with inscriptions and verses from the sacred texts; its floor is sheathed with marble, and it has a colored dome on the roof. I examined it with care while Agarwati went to make inquiries about seeing the swami. When he returned he told me that the swami had been in a profound *samadhi* for several days, and that he had only just come out of it. Apparently his disciples and the Brahmans of the temple were just then attending to him in his subterranean cell, but he had agreed to receive me. Agarwati was very excited at this news and he explained that the swami spoke only in Tamil; he said he would find an interpreter, however, if I wished to ask him any-

thing. He also told me that the swami's name was Sukhdevananda.

We took off our shoes and climbed down the narrow staircase that led to his cell. Down below it was cool and shadowy, and it took me some time to get used to the darkness, since the only light in the room came in from a high window. Gradually, however, I began to make out the form of a man sitting with his legs crossed on a small platform raised off the ground. He was surrounded by disciples who were massaging his arms and legs, while another kept placing wet cloths on his shaven head. The swami didn't move at all, and his eyes were closed. The other people in the room were all reclining comfortably on the floor, and I sat down with them, close by the swami. The room seemed to be filled with a strange odor, which may have come from some overripe mangoes piled in a corner. Through the stone walls I could also hear the sound of water—the waves of the Ganges beating against the foundations outside. We were, in fact, under water, and it seemed as though the room was part of the submerged continent of Atlantis. The smell was that of the fruit of Atlantis, and the men were the priests of Avalon, the City of the Dead. The swami too emanated a strange odor, a mixture of death and of resurrection. Coming from a deep tomb beneath the waters, it also seemed to emerge from the Serpent beneath the Tree of Paradise. I began to realize how intoxicating the atmosphere of this cell was, and I knew that I too would have lost consciousness there, for I had already experienced what was happening to the swami. I had already been buried alive.

After a while the swami began to click his dry tongue; he opened his eyes and glanced up towards the light from the window overlooking the Ganges. Then he smiled faintly, as if moved by something in his memory. Agarvati turned to me to ask if I wanted to speak with the swami, since he had obtained an interpreter. I smiled and nodded my head. "No . . . what is there to say?"

We then left and climbed up the long staircase that led to the outside world. We strolled over to the river bank, where we found a number of launches, and the Swami Sidananda accompanied by a

group of pilgrims. The swami was just about to leave in order to take food to a colony of lepers. His head was covered with his saffron robe to protect it from the sun. Agarwati and I approached his boat, but he said nothing; he glanced at me only briefly. He seemed preoccupied and distant. I realized that I was watching an ancient scene: it had been enacted before by fishermen, and Sidananda was an Indian St. John.

We also took a launch, but only to return to the *ashram*. It was the first time I had ever crossed the Ganges. I put my hand into the water, so as to touch it, and let it flow between my fingers.

* * *

I had lunch on the floor of the *ashram*, eating as I had learned to do with my hands, and surrounded by monks and pilgrims. Afterwards Agarwati took me to his room, where he had spread a mat out on the floor so that I could rest. He also left me one of his *dhotis*. Lying half naked I tried to sleep, but, as in the *ashram* of the Mother, it was too hot. I felt exhausted, but all I could do was fall into a semiconscious state from which I returned, some hours later, to find Agarwati watching over me. He told me that the secretary, Sidananda, was waiting for me to take tea with him in his cell.

I found Sidananda seated on the floor, surrounded by children and animals. Smiling, he asked them to leave, but the monkeys kept returning, or at least peeped through the door and the window. There was a pile of books in the room, and a number of sandalwood sticks burning in a bronze censer. I sat down near Sidananda, and he offered me tea and biscuits. "You are different," he said. "You seem capable of living as we do, and that is why I wanted to invite you to take this modest tea with me."

"Different?" I replied. "I don't know. Sometimes I feel like abandoning everything in order to live alone in the mountains. I have always had this dream, and I even tried to do it, a long time ago."

"It is not necessary to live in the mountains," he said. "The abandonment can be interior. Fifteen minutes a day are enough. Every morning sit down in your room, alone, and put your mind in a state of blankness.

Forget everything; forget your name, your country, your family, everything. What you really are will remain with you. And after that fifteen-minute session you will be able to return to your work and your daily occupation in the world. But don't be bound to the fruit of your actions, or even to the actions themselves. These fifteen minutes of meditation will give you strength to live two lives, one beside the other. And then, one day, one of these two lives will gradually and naturally overpower the other; although it is not even necessary for this to happen, since the two lives will in effect have been together all along. All you really have to do is to overcome the ego."

"The ego?" I asked. "I'm not sure whether I want to overcome it or not; sometimes I want to recognize it and to experience it to its utmost."

The young swami looked away, through the door, but he remained smiling. Outside, the monkeys were swinging in the trees.

We had been talking for some time. The Swami Sidananda had come from Madras, where he had received his doctorate in Economics; afterwards he decided to go to Rishikesh in order to devote himself to monastic life. I could not understand his intention, for he was very different from his master, the Swami Sivananda. He was more ascetic and self-torturing, and I imagined that he was an expert in the science of Hatha yoga and Raja yoga. If the Swami Sivananda had ever been ascetic, he certainly was no longer, for these were the words of the song he had sung: "A little meditation, a little prayer, a little pleasure, a little pain, a little bit of everything."

At Sidananda's suggestion we then went to visit the swami in his room at the river's edge. There we found him with his monks and with some visitors. One of the monks, a young man with Greek features, was bowed down before him, and with his black eyes with their long eyelashes, and with his straight profile, he looked like a classical figure. He was engaged in opening letters which he passed on to the swami, who then read them quickly before dictating some reply. When he saw me the swami signaled me to sit down beside him, and I imagined that the moment had arrived for my consultation with him, and I prepared to ask him what I had been wanting to ask all day.

"Would you tell me, Swamiji, something about the sacred Mount Kailas?"

"Why not?" he replied with a casual smile.

"When you were there, did you ever see a hermit, or a monastery inhabited by old Brahmans?"

He looked at me for a moment in silence before replying. "Not exactly on Mount Kailas," he said, "but nearby, there are a number of monasteries, one for example called Nyandi or Nyandi Gompa. Then, of course, a great many pilgrims climb the foothills of the sacred mountain."

"But is there nothing on the mountain itself?" I asked. "Isn't there a cave there? My Master told me that his masters live somewhere within this mountain. He said the mountain was perforated, and that a special light flooded the place."

"There is nothing there," Sivananda replied. "Perhaps farther away on the other side . . ."

I remembered the paintings of Mount Kailas that I had seen in my Master's house, as well as other paintings of the sacred mountain that I had seen. And I remembered that there was a mysterious shadow, not unlike the entrance of a cave. It could be seen on the Dirapuk side of the mountain.

Since it was late, the swami then invited me to go down with him to the Ganges. We sat together beside the river, and the swami dipped his toes in the water. Looking at the surface of the Ganges in the dusk of the late afternoon, I began to imagine that I could see the dome of a mountain reflected in the water, as if it were the reflection of Mount Kailas mirrored in the sacred waters of Lake Manasarovar.

* * *

It was nighttime, and the assembly hall of the *ashram* was already full. The musicians were playing, flower petals were flying through the air and the whole room was enveloped with the smoke of perfumed incense. The monks were reciting verses from the Ramayana, and they seemed to be, like Homer's Greeks, singing the story of their heroes. But here the legend was divine and the life they sang of was

the life of God. Moreover, in the center of the room there was a living god. Reclining on a soft sofa, he was surrounded by the faithful who sat about him, enraptured and openmouthed. They fanned him, and let flowers fall over him. They also threw fruit and coins at his thick, naked feet. They looked as though they wanted to bathe him in milk, like a Roman Emperor, and to envelop him in sweet fruits and caramels. From time to time this god would take an apple and toss it to one of his favorites, or to some faithful follower hidden in a corner, who would seize it with a mixture of humility and pride because he had been chosen by the god, and was preferred for the moment. This god also threw an apple at me. I caught it in the air and looked into his eyes, and there I noticed a sparkling of good humor and a certain complicity. Then, after a while, Sivananda got up, and, taking a musical rattle made of metal sticks and bells, he began to dance and sing. The loose folds of his flesh wriggled as he moved about. But Sivananda had now moved beyond the immediate scene before him: he was living the myth and was enacting his divine role.

I began to wonder what really was taking place. Was this merely an example of an enormously inflated ego? Certainly it would have been considered so among us. But what happens when there is no ego in our sense of the word? What is it that becomes inflated then?

At Rishikesh everything was so different that it would be superficial to judge it by our own values, and to say that this was merely an instance of outrageous vanity or pride. For the real essence of that scene in the *ashram* was goodness and ingenuousness. It seemed to be the act of a childlike and innocent soul trying to revive a myth, and to resurrect the real past of the gods.

Yet I really cannot speak with any certainty about this matter, and therefore I prefer not to judge it. For the fact is I really know nothing about it, absolutely nothing at all.

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Very early in the morning the disciples and visitors go to practice their yoga gymnastics in the hall on top of a small hill. At that very hour, the young Swami Sidanada will probably be in profound medita-

tion in his small cell. His eyes will be turned inward, towards other worlds. On the other side of the river, the Swami Sukhdevananda may be revisiting the submerged Atlantis from which he had just returned when I visited him. All over India, along the roads and in the mountains, pilgrims are meditating and dreaming, and as they wash in the holy waters they invoke their gods. The Swami Sivananda is probably still asleep.

In the large hall on the top of the hill I watched the various *asanas*. Some of the yogis were able to pull in their stomachs so far that the line of their backbone was visible on the skin in front. Others were standing on their heads. These exercises make no sense if you consider them merely as physical gymnastics. Unlike Swedish exercises, they are not designed simply to develop muscles; rather they have psychical purposes. The point is to overcome the heaviness of the body and to reactivate the nervous or psychical centers in the various parts of the body. In all of these exercises, the mind takes a prominent role; the *asanas* have to be practiced consciously, for they pursue an objective that is beyond the immediate physical world. Yet even those who don't practice these exercises with a full consciousness of their purpose can discover an imperceptible change in their personality. Quite unconsciously their vision of the world will become modified, and they will find a certain peace and serenity. The reason for this is that those exercises activate certain psychical centers which are ordinarily inactive or paralyzed.

I left the hall and walked along a path that wound about the top of the hill. The sun had not yet risen, and there was only a hint of light from the distance. After a few minutes I came across a small white temple, built on top of a mound. A young man was sitting on the steps, and when he greeted me I realized that he was a European. He beckoned me to approach and then asked me whether I would like to meditate for a while in his temple. "I have lived here all during my stay at the *ashram*," he said, "and I am waiting to be initiated by Sivananda." He also told me that he was originally from Germany.

I accepted his offer and entered the temple. Inside, the atmosphere was

heavy and dark. I sat down on the floor with my legs crossed and closed my eyes, trying to concentrate on the space between my eyebrows. Imperceptibly I began to see the image of my old Master and to hear his instructions: "Don't think at all but focus on the space between the eyebrows. To see through the third eye, you have to squint and fix your gaze, but most of all you have to wait." Then suddenly I heard the word Kailas, and saw the image of the mountain. At that I realized I could not continue my search by wholly internal means. I knew that I would have to pursue a physical pilgrimage along the dusty roads of the Himalayas.

When I got up I felt utterly exhausted. I walked slowly back to the *ashram*, where I found a number of workers engaged in putting up a statue of Swami Sivananda. I wondered what it would be like to have a statue erected to oneself in one's own lifetime.

The time for leaving had come, and Agarwati stood beside me on the road. Just then I noticed a man running along the road towards me. In spite of the heat, he was wearing Tibetan clothes and was carrying an umbrella. I recognized him as the same man whom I had seen throwing food into the waters of the Ganges and reciting verses over it. When he came up to me, he said: "Last night I went to the river, and the stars spoke to me about you. They were reflected in the current of the water." He looked at me fixedly. His eyes had the black intensity of madness, and his beard moved up and down in time with the heaving of his breath.

The Rejoicing Monsters

I knew that one day I would have to return to Rishikesh, since it was the gateway to the source of the Ganges, not to mention the regions around Gangotri and Uttarkashi, which is where the real yogis live. But first I had to go down to Hardwar, one of the seven sacred cities of India. It is located on the shores of the Ganges, and is visited by thousands of pilgrims who go there to swim in the river. It was already late when I arrived and the place was crowded, for it was a *mehla* day, which meant that thousands of pilgrims had congregated here. The docks and the steps along the river were crowded with people, and a small lagoon nearby was full of old men, children, and women who were bathing. Nearly all of them were fully dressed, and the saris sticking to the skins of the old women made them look like skeletons. The water was muddy, but the people put their heads under it and drank it; in all likelihood they also relieved themselves in it.

The streets were crowded with fakirs, some of whom were covered with ashes, while others had thorns sticking into their skin. One of them had a bluish arm pierced entirely through by a long nail. But what was most extraordinary were the monsters which here and there were placed in carts. One of these, I noticed, had a small childlike body. His feet were where his hands should have been, and for hands he had feet. Yet he also had an enormous head with a long flowing beard, and he spoke with a deep bass voice. Nearby I found another grotesque, with an enormous belly, squatting on the branch of a tree. Nightmarish as they were, all of these creatures kept pictures of them-

selves which they showed to passersby. These self-portraits even seemed to exaggerate their ugliness and monstrosity, yet they seemed much amused by them and laughed contagiously. Nearly always they were surrounded by a group of spectators also laughing uproariously.

In the center of the town, where there were public baths and docks along the wide and majestic river, crowds of people were bathing. There too were dozens of temples, many of them filled with people singing. In the streets, cows and donkeys mingled with the crowd. From high balconies overlooking the river a number of boys were diving into the water. Elsewhere whole families walked into the river, holding hands. But nowhere was there the slightest evidence of natural joy; everything was silent and dreamlike, for everything was part of a ritual that had been repeated for centuries. Across the river the sun was slowly setting, and its rays tinged the surface of the water with a pink veneer. As I gazed at it I began to feel a strong desire to submerge myself under that surface.

To break the spell I decided to spend some time walking about the town. On the outskirts I discovered some small temples, most of them placed in groves containing huge, gnarled trees. Yet inevitably I found myself called back to the water, which at least had a certain freshness. There at the river's edge I saw a naked old man carrying a trident. The water was up to his waist, and he was repeating Sanskrit verses. As night was beginning to fall I decided to return to the dock. Many people were still there, singing and praying. For light they had the stars and a few torches, and they seemed to be carried away by an ecstasy of singing and chanting. Knowing that most of the pilgrims would simply spend the night sleeping on the ground, I planned to do so myself, and therefore looked for a place near the central section of the steps. When at last I found a spot I discovered I had settled near an old priest, dressed in a saffron robe, who kept raising his arms to heaven, shaking small cymbals and bells. As he did so he sang in a very high voice and gazed up at the highest stars.

Slowly my eyes began to close, and I fell asleep. And among my dreams was one of an old man wearing a saffron-colored cloak. I also dreamed of those diabolically joyful self-portraits.

When the Fish Enters the Aquarium

The similarities between the legends of Krishna and Christ have frequently been noticed. The names themselves are similar. Like Krishna, Christ was born of a virgin, and the idea of Mary's virginity may have been adopted from the Oriental legend. Both Krishna and Christ were born under tyrants, and both Herod and Kansa ordered the killing of children. Other similarities abound: each was born at midnight and had traits of character in common with the other. And when they died the heavens were full of signs of their passing.

At the same time, there are doubtless great differences between the two, and Krishna's myth is essentially pagan in its form. Probably what happened is that over the years each myth was influenced by the other, for in ancient times there was considerable commerce between India and the Middle East. In the first century A.D., for example, a number of early Christians visited the coast of Malabar in the south of India and there the apostle, St. Thomas, preached. It is even possible that the crafty Brahmins, hearing the story of Christ, incorporated parts of it into the legend of their own god. On the other hand, three hundred years before the birth of Christ the story of Krishna had already been compiled in India, and had begun to influence the Essenes in the Middle East. There the legend of a sacrificial god was already familiar, and the story of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhnaton and his god of love had taken hold of the imagination of the world, for Akhnaton was sacrificed to the fury of the priests of Amon. All of these stories seem part of a universal myth,

and the legends of Osiris and Akhnaton, and those of the Christian Father and Son, and of Krishna and Adonis, have much in common. Yet there is little purpose in searching for similarities between these legends or for influences of the one upon the other, for the myth is always the same and revolves timelessly down through the ages. In certain eras it may appear to deepen or to become more subtle, but essentially it is always the same, and thus some have thought that it belongs more to the universe than to something within man himself. But to search in the stars rather than on earth for its source is merely to engage in circular logic, for astrology merely projects human situations into the sky. Astrology is merely a picture of the drama that takes place within the collective mind of man, and it is not something that has been entirely replaced by the appearance of modern astronomy.

In astrology, the zodiacal sign of Aries is the Ram. In terms of world history, Aries represents the first era; it is the sign of the Aryans and of the Golden Fleece. In short, it is the age before the Flood; it represents the primeval home, man's primitive fatherland, the place first left by the Eternal Pilgrim who, with all of his people, set out across the sands of the deserts in search of a Promised Land in the southern region. Aries is the sun that rises over the mountains and sets in the sea. Aries is the old home that was lost, and man has not yet found anything wholly satisfactory to replace it. He has found a different home called Pisces, whose zodiacal image is that of a fish, but it is not the same thing. His voyage to his present home has nevertheless been long and arduous, and it has involved many psychological changes. The old law of the first pilgrims was a law of fire, and was essentially a representation of the Father. Its image, moreover, was that of the fire of sacrifice. But with the coming of the Son the image changed and took the form of the swastika, while the new law was that of a sacrifice accepted by love. This new epoch of Pisces more or less began when the Brahmans began to codify the Mahabharata, transforming Rama into Krishna, just as Adonis, Dionysus and Pan found expression in Christ. All of these qualities of the soul needed expression, and their astrological form was merely a reflection of the Collective Unconscious.

In the West the fish of Pisces have nevertheless taken a different form from those of the East. In the West they lie athwart one another, taking the shape of a cross, whereas in India two fish rotate in a circle, each nearly catching the tail of the other. Thus the Indian cross is a swastika, and the Christ of India is not so dramatically divided, nor so agonizedly polarized, as is the Christ of the West. The European Christ is the Christ of absolutes: absolute good and absolute light. Everything terrestrial and everything that lies in the shadows belongs to Christ's opposite, the Devil. Krishna, on the other hand, is something like the god Pan, and he incorporates not only light and good, but shadows and evil. Everything in India follows this same pattern; everything is mixed, but without transition, and every saint is something of a sinner, and every sinner has something of the saint in him. In India, all of life is accepted simultaneously.

The Christ of Atlantis must have been like this Indian Christ. Born as a fish in Pisces, killed as a lamb, and ultimately resurrected as a dove in Aquarius. This epoch may also belong to the third person of the Trinity—the Holy Ghost. Little is known of this mysterious third person: all we know is that it has the shape of a dove and speaks with tongues of fire. It is curious that while the Father and the Son have human characteristics, this third being lacks them. Little has been done to develop this symbol, and perhaps it is dangerous to do so. It may merely mean the reincorporation of the animal nature that is negated in Pisces, except that in this new era the animal will have wings. At that point the Plumed Serpent may once again rise, and man may achieve his totality and his control over light and shadow. Surely the Holy Ghost must mean the deification of man, and this resurrection will not only be of the spirit but also of the flesh. From the deep waters of a new Flood, which may be an inundation by fire, the Plumed Serpent will finally emerge as a dove and will represent man at his highest and most complete form.

Holy Places

The night of the eighth of Badhrom, which is at the beginning of August, is the night when Krishna was born, and at that time the Birla Temple in New Delhi is always full of people. I decided to visit it that night, and when I arrived I found thousands of people crowded together near the entrance and stretching along the marble steps that lead up to the temple. The grounds and statuary were illuminated by colored lights, and all along the way policemen, wearing turbans and carrying long sticks, were trying to keep order among the human river that overflowed the place, ascending and descending the stairs, moving around the towers and marble elephants towards the central hall of the temple which contained the image of Krishna. The scene was magical, but in the month of Badhrom the heat was suffocating.

Finally, with great difficulty, and feeling more dead than alive, I reached the entrance to the central hall. The procession pressed forward slowly from the left and passed into the room, which was full of people, all of whom seemed delirious as they sang the exploits of the god and waited for the coming of midnight. One of the walls was covered with mirrors and these seemed to double the size of the rooms. Upon reaching the statue of Krishna, in the central part of the hall, the faithful would kneel down and throw rose petals and coins, sweets, and fruit towards it. This image was a life-sized statue of Krishna, carved from colored marble. When my part of the procession reached the center of the hall I suddenly felt myself being grabbed by one of

the priests of the temple, who pulled me aside and then pushed me into the center of a circle of singers. There I finally found a place to sit down and crossed my legs. Everyone was singing and following the direction of one man. The song often changed in pace and style, but there was never any awkwardness or hesitation between the various parts. Many of the singers had drums which they beat, while others had metal instruments or bells attached to sticks. As always, the rhythm was hypnotic and passionate. The song would begin slowly and softly, like those wailing chants of Andalusia, but then little by little the singers would pick up speed, until they finally reached a convulsive conclusion. Everyone in the place was singing. Near me was a young father with his small son, and both were singing happily. The child had a marvelously tender voice. After a little his father got up and, taking some metal sticks, he jumped up and down with them for nearly an hour. Soon he was bathed in sweat and appeared to be in agony. I was afraid he was going to die of a heart attack. The atmosphere inside the hall was like an oven, and from time to time men carrying large fans would move through the sections trying to give relief to the masses assembled on the floor, but their fanning did little good. The little boy near me sang as though he were Krishna himself, and the smoke of sandalwood was mixed with the vapor that rose from the convulsive singers. Soon I found myself singing and clapping my hands to the rhythm. Without knowing why, I closed my eyes and began to repeat that undulating phrase: "*Hari Krishna, Hari Rama, Hari Krishna, Hari Krishna, Hari Rama. . .*"

Then suddenly I felt something hit me, and noticed a number of men falling to the ground not far from where I was. It was as though a cyclone had passed through the room. A man with long hair and painted eyebrows, being possessed by the god, had begun to perform his ritual. He took off his shirt and his trousers and, standing half naked before the statue of Krishna, he began to twist and dance. The crowd began to shout joyfully and to sing louder, and the rhythm of their singing grew faster and faster. The man bent his body from side to side, and accompanied his profane dance with guttural sounds which he made

in his throat. As he danced before Krishna he seemed to be possessed by the blue god, and he gave himself to that god. He jumped about in contortions and uttered wails of pleasure and pain. The crowd shouted with him and kept time with his rhythm.

And so the music and dancing continued until midnight, which was the hour when the blue god was born. It was as though these masses of the faithful had acted as midwives, pushing and pulling their god into the world.

With the arrival of midnight, the scene was transformed into what it must have been in the month of Badhrom thousands and thousands of years ago. We were all standing with the palms of our hands together, and with our eyes closed, and we all sang softly and sweetly. There were tears in our eyes, for this was the greatest happiness: the blue god had once again been born; he had been resurrected in the soul and would dance again during the coming year, like a sun over a paradise of flowers.

* * *

Every year this same cosmic drama is repeated all over India. In open-air theaters and in the temple courtyards, the school children all become Krishna at least for one night, and all of India follows the famous story and legend, for it is a personal legend and represents the essence of the Indian people.

I decided to go to Mathura, Krishna's own city, in order to see how the anniversary of his birth was celebrated there. Since Mathura is not far from Delhi, I was but one of thousands of others who had taken this pilgrimage from the capital. Arriving before noon, I went to visit the museum, which is well known for the treasures from the Gupta epoch which it contains, and while I was there I was given a flower by an old man, and some children sang for me. Afterwards I went to take a rest in the temple. It was crowded with beggars and sick people and the faithful who had come there to eat and sleep, for a temple in India is always a house. As usual, there was a mixed lot inside, and there was plenty of dirt; but at the same time there was also a

certain freshness, as if, in some dark corner of the temple, the tropical vegetation outside had been epitomized in a purer essence within. In Hindu temples you have the feeling that there is some invisible river of the clearest water flowing down from the altar; this river seems to flow through all of the baroque temples of India.

But my true reason for going to Mathura was to see the real river, the Jumna, by which Krishna played as a child. It was in this portion of the river that the serpent Kali-Naga lived, and it was there that Krishna fought his great battle. The village of Gokul was nearby, and many of the faithful took pilgrimages there. I myself decided to go to Vrindavana, however, where the child-god had danced with the *gopis*. It was already late afternoon when I started, and by the time I had gotten halfway there, night fell. My companion was a Sikh with a black beard, and I suggested to him that we sleep along the way under the stars. He agreed and we lay down by the side of the road, he meanwhile unbuckling his sword and sticking it into the ground. There were a number of other pilgrims nearby, and several camels were taking their rest under a neighboring tree. From time to time I could hear a woman coughing and moaning. But gradually, as I gazed up into the sky, I began to lose myself in the stars, and I soon began to experience a sensation which I used to have as a child—that of not lying with my back along the surface of the ground, but of hanging from its surface. I began to feel that the sky was not above me but below me, and that I could easily slip away and fall into it. This was precisely the feeling of vertigo and terror I had felt as a child. It was the sensation of falling endlessly into a bottomless pit, and on that particular night I had the feeling that I was falling into the dark blue color of Krishna himself.

Then suddenly I felt something cold on my face. At first I thought it was a snake, but it was only a small frog that had jumped on me. I did not move, however, because I was still half lost in the stars. The Sikh had already fallen asleep by his sword, the woman was still coughing and moaning a little distance away and I could hear the heavy breathing of the camels. Gradually I too began to fall asleep, feeling that the stars were really within me. I fell more and more deeply into a "Krishna."

At dawn, when I awoke, I found myself covered with dew. It was warm with the morning sun, however, and the camels had already started along the dusty road to Vrindavana. The Sikh and I got up and prepared to follow them. When we finally reached the city, we went directly to the gardens of Vrindavana and decided to spend most of the day there. These gardens of course were new, but it seemed probable that the legendary ones had been located in much the same place. At any rate, they had legendary qualities, and were filled with fantastic peacocks and shrieking monkeys. Moreover, as in the past, the gardens seemed to be full of milkmaids and shepherdesses looking for some kind of Krishna among the flowers and fig trees. Most anxious of all of these was Radha, who was the strange lover of the blue god. For Radha had already married: she was the wife of a shepherd. Yet Krishna made her his favorite and fused himself with her in the center of the dance. Here is a real part of India's strange mystery: Radha realized that her true lover was not her husband but the wild blue dancer, who, with his flute, was like the great god Pan. Yet there is also something real and human about this relationship, for few know who their real husbands or wives are. Every man has his Radha, and every woman her blue god.

There is of course something illicit about this love: it is not the love of ordinary life. Rather it is an ideal love, at the margin of existence and beyond the "works and days of hands." It is a fusion beyond the immediate, which first took place in the ancient jungles and gardens of Vrindavana. Late at night, far away from her husband and from her daily chores, Radha took part in a mad dance that led to an ecstatic union of the eternal feminine with the eternal masculine. Afterwards she returned from the garden to her house and took up her usual role as faithful wife to the shepherd, and there she decided to remain until she heard the call again. There is a strange inexplicable mystery in all of this, and in the end it is even possible that the husband was proud that his wife had slept with a god and given birth to a god.

Walking down the narrow side streets of the city, I finally returned to the river. Then I saw a number of huge tortoises resting on the bank and floating in the stream. These were the tortoises of Brahma

and of Vishnu, who dominated the first epoch of the world—Satya Yuga—in which man lived until he was four thousand years old. Vishnu at that time took the form of a tortoise, in order to go down to the bottom of the sea to find the mysterious "thing" that had been lost in the Flood. There, at the bottom of the Sea of Milk, he stirred the waters and raised up a mountain—Mount Kailas. Then the gods and demons took hold of the serpent Vasuki, and, splitting it lengthwise, they tied the ends together with a piece of rope. With this longer serpent they once again began to agitate the sea until they discovered the mysterious thing that had been lost in the Flood. Finally it appeared, taking the form of Amrita, the water of life, and also Rambha, who was a marvelous nymph. We may also consider this lost thing to have been Radha, but inevitably it was also Visha, or poison.

The Bird That Sings Over the Ruins

At dawn I went to see the Taj Mahal. In truth, I did not have to go anywhere, for I slept there all night, nearby on the grass. As the first rays of the sun began to shine over the horizon I walked about the grounds, gazing at the Taj Mahal from various angles. Its white dome was tinged with pink, and the inlaid stones and precious jewels glistened in the morning light. In its total form it is a squared circle, for the central structure with its rounded dome rises from a large square platform. It is a circle in the center of a square, a sacred *mandala*.

* * *

At Fatehpur Sikri a bird sings over the ruins. He begins at dawn and continues singing until noon, and his cry is monotonous and deadly. This bird is usually not visible, for he hides in the grass outside of the ruined walls of the old city or conceals himself in a cupola high over the roofs of the Great Mogul's palace.

At noon in Fatehpur Sikri everything seems to be paralyzed by the heat, and the air shimmers with the red light of the sandstone. The stones of these palaces and pavilions represent the attempt of a philosopher-king to understand the ephemeral and to use the intellect as a means of glimpsing eternity. Yet his attempt was in vain, for over the symmetry of the asymmetric, and over the equilibrium of the irregular, the bird still utters his monotonous, deathlike note, and terrestrial time is triumphant.

Fatigue

I was in a small room in Old Delhi, but this time I felt a strange malaise. I was particularly bothered by smells, and I had lost my appetite. The very sight of a mango made me feel sick, and all I wanted to do was to lie down. I would therefore stretch out on my bed for hours at a time, trying not to hear the noise of the shrieking monkeys outside and never so much as glancing out of the window.

I soon realized that I had caught a fever. At night I couldn't sleep, and if I dozed off for a moment I would wake up shaking all over and bathed in sweat. I knew I was sick, but had no idea what was really wrong. My Sikh servant suggested that I see an *ayurvedic* doctor, who practices the traditional medicine of the country, but I did nothing about it. The feeling of exhaustion and discomfort increased, and after a while I began to feel repelled by my Indian experiences. The sweat and sickly smells, the dust in the roads, the memory of sick people and beggars all began to overwhelm me, and I wanted to run away.

Then, at last, I was visited by a doctor. He sat by my bed without saying a word, and then after a while he left. Apparently he had been coming for almost a week without my realizing it. Sometimes he would speak to me, but more often he remained silent. He was not an *ayurvedic* doctor, but a modern allopath trained in India. One day he began to question me.

"Have you seen the temples of Khajuraho," he asked, "with their sexual sculpturings? They represent the whole Tantric method, through

which control of the mind is attained in the middle of sexual pleasure. . . ."

I could hear only a portion of what he was saying, but he kept on talking.

"Let's not bother with your illness," he continued, "but let it cure itself. In time we will know what has caused it. But now tell me something of your internal experiences. When you are better I will give you a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita which was written from a more scientific point of view; and I will also give you something about Raja yoga or Kundalini yoga, which was written by Dr. Vasant G. Rele. Those old gods of Khajuraho made much of the Kundalini. Today it would be called the libido, I suppose. . . ." After the doctor left the fever rose again.

Later in the day I saw the Sikh sitting in the corner of the room. He kept his eyes on me, for he was anxious about my health. Then the untouchable, whose job it was to sweep floors, came into the room and began to raise up great clouds of dust which choked me.

With that, I realized I could not go on any longer. I realized too that this crisis had been caused by something inside of me. It was perhaps a result of the tension that had been built up by the intrusion of scepticism into my long and seemingly endless pilgrimage.

Once again the doctor arrived, and when he sat by my bed he said: "I know what it is. It's malaria."

The very precision of his diagnosis made me doubt him, and I began to worry. But then I remembered Sivananda, the fat swami whom I had seen dancing and singing at Rishikesh by the River Ganges, and who was worshipped like a Buddha. Suddenly inspired, I decided to send him a message telling him that I was sick, and asking him to think of me. Then, when I had done so, I forgot all about it, and for days the fever continued. At one time I saw a monkey looking in through the window. He made signs and grimaces, and I sat up a little to look at him. I stared directly into his eyes, but could not find the least sign of comprehension there. A dog or cat, or even one of the lizards hanging on the wall, would have understood me better. It then

struck me as being very unlikely that man was descended from the monkey, and I had the feeling that the monkey realized this most of all. It seems much more probable that we are descended from dogs; I at least have always felt that dogs were my brothers. They never say anything, but they always seem to understand us. The dog has been man's companion for a long time in history, and unlike the horse, who was replaced by the machine, the dog will never become obsolete, for he touches a chord in man that no other being reaches. The Indians, however, have never understood this relationship, and it is probable that their gods, and their monkey-gods like Hanuman, do not want them to. For when I looked into the face of the monkey at the window I realized how little the gods care about us. In reality we have nothing in common with them. But since dogs have never been gods, they are happy to stay with us and defend us. In the godlike world of India, however, the dog has no place at all.

Later on, when I had closed my eyes, I began to sense the presence of a large shadow, as though it were a face pressed close to my own. Then, in a flash, I realized that this was the face of Swami Sivananda, who had come to visit me. I did not open my eyes, however; rather I let that shadow protect me from the fever and shield me from the noisy laughter of the monkeys. Then, little by little, I grew calm and fell asleep.

On the following day I felt strangely better. My fever had left me and I began to sit up and walk about my room. Then, in two days' time, I received a message from the Swami Sivananda telling me that he had received my letter and that he had ordered prayers and meditations for my health. He must have been sending the message just when I experienced the presence of the protective shadow in my room. At any rate, this event is in keeping with the spirit of India. Sivananda is certainly disconcerting insofar as he has allowed himself to be deified during his own lifetime and has published so many propaganda films and pamphlets about himself. These are unattractive actions and make one sceptical about him. In the end, however, they don't seem to matter, and I for one no longer care whether the swami is honest or

not. He probably does not live a saintly life: he probably does not meditate or scarcely does so; certainly he likes good food and he likes to have a good time. Yet none of this behavior worries me in the least, for it takes place entirely on the surface. Underneath that enormous mountain of a body, there is the heart of a gentleman. Like everything else in India, Sivananda is a combination of opposites: he is both king and gluttonous bishop.

It is undeniable that conscious thought and intuition frequently contradict each other, or at least operate on different planes. For this reason there was no need for me to return to Rishikesh to see Sivananda, because I had already seen him once and for all. Nevertheless, I am sure that it was his visionary appearance which brought my recovery. With his letter he sent me some red powder made of sandalwood to put on my forehead, and he also sent me some leaves gathered in the Himalayas. I put a little of the sandalwood between my eyebrows and also lit a few sticks, which soon began to perfume the room. I no longer felt bothered by the smell.

With the lessening of the fever, I fully expected the doctor to say that I was cured of malaria. Be that as it may, convalescence was something to look forward to, for it was a return to life, and a time of hope. Gradually I continued to get better, and then one day I was visited by a man wearing an astrakhan hat and dressed like a Mohammedan. He told me, however, that he was a Hindu, and that he had come to teach me Hindi and Sanskrit. But when he heard that I had been ill and that I was convalescing, he gave up his predatory manner and quietly sat down on the floor, crossing his legs.

"You should leave Delhi," he said, "and get away from this infernal heat."

"Yes," I answered. "I am planning to go to Musoorie or perhaps to Simla or Almora. I am particularly interested in Almora because it is supposed to be the gateway to Mount Kailas."

For a moment he continued to look at me without speaking. Then he said: "You can't go there now, and anyhow Kailas is in China. What you ought to do instead is go to Kashmir. From there you can travel to

Amarnath, which is a holy place of pilgrimage for the Hindus, and which is where you can see the caves which contain Shiva's ice lingam."

"Yes," I said. "Back to the ice. . . ."

That, then, was the thing to do: to visit Shiva in his snowbound abode at Amarnath. There I would try to discover his secret and to penetrate the mystery. Already I felt stronger, and the hope of a new adventure filled me with joy.

The Tomb of Jesus

The trans-Himalayan zone includes the Hindu Kush, the Karakoram, the Kuenlun and the Kailas, which are ranges of mountains which stretch like waves in the sea. But the name *Himalaya*, which means "abode of the snows," is more properly applied to the great summits that extend from the western borders of China to Kumaon, Kashmir, and finally Nanga Parbat at the other end. The highest of these mountains, and they are the highest in the world, are found in Nepal. The lesser ranges in the trans-Himalayan belt are relatively lower, although the second highest of all these mountains, K-2, is in Karakoram. Altogether, these immense giants, considered the abodes of the gods, stretch from China to the Valley of the Indus, terminating in the immense peak called Nanga Parbat.

Undoubtedly the most solitary of all the summits is K-2 in Karakoram. It rises from the center of a desert, and looks like an angel hovering over the steppes. The nearest village to it is a full six days' journey away. It is something like the solitary Nanga Parbat, but the white light emanating from its peak is even more beautiful. Yet it is hard to be too exact in comparing these mountains, for there are a number of magnificent peaks, like Rakaposhi, which are almost unknown. Others, like those in Pamir, can be seen only from Turkestan.

The extraordinary height of the Himalayas is due to their granitic composition, which has enabled them to maintain their height while the lesser foothills have suffered from erosion. Moreover, the central

axis of the range as a whole is also made of granite. Great forces working on material especially susceptible to geological thrust have caused the creation of extraordinarily high peaks. These mountains have been able to preserve their great height because of the thick mantle of ice and snow which shields them from disintegrating elements in the atmosphere such as sudden rains and varying temperatures. These have caused the lower zones, which have no snow, to erode quickly. It is believed that the Himalayas were formed by great masses of granite being thrust up through the weaker surface crust from the center of the planet. No one knows whether they have reached their maximum height or whether they are still increasing in height. There is one theory which claims that, since the Himalayas are a comparatively new formation, they may possibly be affected by a still active internal thrust.

For thousands of years these summits existed in solitude, and there was no sign of any other kind of life until a million years ago. At that time Kashmir, which lies to the south of these gigantic mountains, was almost entirely under water. Indeed, most of the northwest part of the Indian subcontinent was an enormous lake, bounded in at the south by a stretch of land that connected India with Africa. Then, man must have first appeared in Kashmir. How he came into being is, of course, an enormous mystery, but life probably began at some place where the sea and the land met, and when the hot rays of the sun gave substance to the slime of the sea. There the Universe must first have expressed its hidden energy, combining those elements of nature that had earlier been expressed only by the sky and the land and by heaven and hell.

In the meantime the immense peaks of the Himalayas continued their solitary existence down through the centuries. But in them the gods must have spoken, if only in the language of silence, for hundreds of centuries later men were to go to the Himalayas in order to hear their voices. From the very beginning, both the primitive tribes of India and the Aryans looked upon these mountains as the gods of India, and so they have remained, Kanchenjunga, Annapurna, Nanga Parbat, and Mount Kailas. All have definite personalities, and Kailas is known as the sacred abode of Siva and of his wife Parvati.

* * *

At last, having passed through long valleys and crossed over mountain ranges, I arrived in the central valley of Kashmir and reached the city of Srinagar. The countryside was a landscape of valleys surrounded by blue mountains and of lakes bordered by tall trees. In these lakes and canals the Serpent Naga was once adored, and "he" revealed the magic formula which saved a whole world from the waters of the Flood. I had been told that behind the Shalimar gardens, perhaps not far from the place where Siva revealed the Sutras of the Trika philosophy to the wise man, Vasupgupta, I could find the house of the Swami Laxmanju. Like his ancestors, this young swami had chosen to live in an idyllic place and to spend his time studying Trika philosophy, which is a special product of the Kashmirian Sivaism.

One afternoon, shortly after my arrival, I decided to go and see him. I found him living on the top floor of a wooden house, and to reach his room it was necessary to climb an outdoor staircase. He was dressed in a long tunic, but his feet were bare and his head shaven. He looked very young, but his dark eyes seemed to be able to penetrate the afternoon shadows.

We sat down opposite each other, cross-legged, on a white sheet that was spread over the floor. I noticed a number of books and writing implements around, and in the corner some sandalwood sticks were burning. Outside some dogs were barking, and in the distance the mountain shepherds were calling their sheep. For a long time we remained sitting in silence, and then I asked him this question:

"How is it possible to adhere to monism and at the same time to recognize the many forms of reality? Is it not possible that creation has affected the Absolute? If this is not so, why does the Absolute manifest itself at all? Why did Paramashiva, the Perfect One, the number zero, feel a necessity to create the world?"

The swami shook his head and closed his eyes before answering. "Abhinava anticipated this objection by saying: 'We cannot ask why a thing does something, because the thing it does is a part of its own

nature; it is part of its intrinsic constitution. Thus the ultimate nature of a thing cannot be questioned. It is absurd to ask why fire burns or why water quenches thirst or why cold freezes. It is simply in their nature to do so; thus it was in the nature of Paramashiva to reveal himself. As to whether the created world may modify the Absolute and destroy its eternal nature, this is not possible because the very things created in all their multiplicity still remain within the Absolute, just as the waves remain a part of the sea. You cannot say that the ocean is modified by the movement of its waves or tides. They rise and fall, but the ocean remains constant. So Paramashiva is not affected by creation. Paramashiva alone exists independently and unconditionally: the perceptible forms are all dependent and conditional; they are finite and cannot compete with the Absolute.' "

After quoting Abhinava, the Swami Laxmanju lapsed into silence. I watched him, wondering what he was thinking and whether he himself believed what he had quoted. Where the Trika justifies the creation of the world, the Vedanta remains silent and makes no attempt at an explanation; it simply denies reality and calls it Illusion. The Vedanta does not explain the mystery or the concept of original nothingness. The Trika, on the other hand, uses images and comparisons with the ocean in its explanation, and these comparisons are dear to the soul and climate of India.

I then made this statement to the swami: "There is nothing more dangerous than the image, than a comparison with the visible to explain the invisible. Such comparisons seem so certain and exact that I am sure they are unreliable and uncertain. I am very sceptical of the image; I have little confidence in what seems to be true. . . ."

The swami remained silent, and in the shadows his head moved imperceptibly, swaying slightly from side to side.

* * *

I decided to stay on a small houseboat on Dahal Lake where I had found a solitary place near a large growth of lotus flowers, which extended across the water to a nearby island. A *shikara*, which is like a

Venetian gondola, came with the houseboat, and I used it from time to time to go into Srinagar. But for the most part I stayed quietly on my houseboat. It was elaborately carved, and inside it had comfortable furniture and floors covered with Persian, Afghan, and Turkish carpets and soft cushions. The houseboat was tied to a tip of land covered with flowers, and occasionally I could hear small children or farmers passing by.

In the late afternoon I would sit out on deck watching the night as it began to cover the blue hills around the lake. Beyond those hills was Ladakh, and farther away Tibet and the steppes of Central Asia. Here was the beginning of the Himalayan region that leads to Kailas and to the enchanted cave of Amarnath which contains Siva's icy lingam.

Gradually the sun sank behind the mountains, tinting the lake and the lotuses with red. A *shikara* garlanded with bright flowers glided smoothly by, and I could hear the boatman and his son singing. Their strange, clear voices rose in Oriental cadences.

With the coming of night I gradually fell asleep lying on the cushions. Between dreams I imagined that I heard the sound of an extraordinary flute growing louder and louder. I opened my eyes, but the sound of the flute did not cease; instead it continued and increased, and I supposed that it must be some shepherd walking along the tip of land where the houseboat was tied up. The sounds he made did not, however, seem actual or real. They seemed to come from some distant period of time, and I was reminded of the god Pan who played in ancient Greece. The melody was extraordinarily intimate and insinuating. I had heard many Indian flutes playing in the dark night in Old Delhi, and I had heard the music of the snake charmers; but this Kashmiri flute seemed to sound across the abyss from pagan times, and from the classical regions of Greece and Crete. Perhaps the flute player I heard was a god who had crossed the plains of Central Asia, through Iskandaria, and who had climbed over the snowy summits of Karakoram and the Khyber Pass in order to find this quiet lake with its perfumed lotus blossoms.

Then I suddenly remembered a dream of more than twenty years

ago. In that dream I was in a distant island of my own country, called Chiloe, and a cart was advancing towards me and bumping along the road. The ground was covered with ferns and there were immense trees all around. Then, when the cart approached, I saw that it contained a small boy wearing a fur cap. He was playing a flute, and when he passed by he smiled in a special way. His deep eyes penetrated me as if they wanted to tell me something I already knew.

* * *

While there are tales of Christ's childhood and of his visit to the temple, there is virtually no information concerning his life during his young manhood. Nobody knows what he did or where he lived until he was thirty, the year when he began his preaching. There is a legend, however, that says that he was in Kashir, the original name for Kashmir. *Ka* means "the same as" or "equal to" and *shir* means Syria. Manuscripts in the Sharda language, which is derived from Sanskrit, seem to bear close relationship to the biblical story. According to this Kashmiri legend, Jesus came to Kashir and studied under holy men, who taught him mysterious signs. These had been preserved intact in the high mountains which had not been inundated by the Flood. Among these may have been the science of Nila, the king of the serpents. Later Jesus returned to the Middle East and he then began to preach among the ignorant masses of Israel the mystical truths he had learned in Kashir. To impress and to convert them, he often used the powers he had acquired through the practice of Yoga, and these were then referred to as miracles. Then in due course Jesus was crucified, but he did not die on the cross. Instead, he was removed by some Essene brothers, restored to good health and sent back to Kashir, where he lived with his masters until his natural death.

There is some evidence which suggests that this legend is Islamic in origin, but it is probably even older. In ancient times there was much traffic between India and the Middle East, and it is very likely that the stories and myths of India were carried across the desert into the Holy Land. Certainly the myth of the crucifixion of a redeemer is of enormous

antiquity, and the concept of the equality of all men had already been preached by Buddha and was carried into Kashmir by King Ashoka long before Jesus began to preach to the fishermen.

A number of investigations have also been made concerning a tomb which is to be found in Srinagar, and which is said to be the tomb of Jesus. It is possible, of course, that this is merely the tomb of an old Islamic saint or of a Sufi master, for there is nothing really precise in these speculations. I myself have seen this tomb, although very few people know about it and it is difficult to find. The section of Srinagar where it is located is called Rozaball and it is in a street which I think is called Khanyar.

It was evening when I first arrived at the tomb, and in the light of the sunset the faces of the men and children in the street looked almost sacred. They looked like people of ancient times; possibly they were related to one of the lost tribes of Israel that are said to have migrated to India. The children were wearing long shirts and primitive jewels, and their eyes were very bright. The building containing the tomb was just at the corner of a square. Taking off my shoes, I entered and found a very old tomb surrounded by a filigree stone fence which protected it, while to one side there was the shape of a footprint cut into the stone. It is said to be the footprint of Yousa-Asaf, and according to the legend, Yousa-Asaf is Jesus.

On the wall of the building hangs an inscription, and below it a translation from the Sharda into English. This inscription reads:

YOUSA-ASAF (KHANYA, SRINAGAR)

The description written below is copied from a book kept in Astana.

When he wrote the short description of the place called Sved Nazair-Udin-Mir, Khanyara of Wakiat-Kashmiri, the famous historian of Kashmir called Khaja Mohammed Azan Dechmarij, declared the following: All the people say that there was a prophet who came to Kashmir a long time ago. That time was called the time of the prophets. In another part of this short description, entitled Wakiati-Kashmir, the historian says: One of the main princes who came to Kashmir and who prayed here a great deal, night and day, was Yousa-Asaf. His tomb is located near Aunzimed, in Khanya Mutwa Nazair-Ud-mir Rozaball Khanyar.

As I knelt to pray, I felt as though I were kneeling in Christ's tomb in Jerusalem. And in its way it seemed curiously more authentic than anything in Israel. For it was certainly more silent and more solemn. Moreover, it was placed in a setting alive with the image of the past—the old faces of the lost tribes, with their deep eyes and sharp profiles.

When the women reached the tomb they did not find him. Jesus was gone, perhaps resurrected in Kashmir. Afterwards, he appeared to the disciples. Perhaps this appearance was the projection of his mind over others, making use of the science he had learned in Kashmir.

Yet if we were to open this tomb in Kashmir we might also find it empty.

The Swami of Ashahabal

In the forest not far from the gardens of Ashahabal, on the way to Pelgham, there lives a swami called Ashokananda. He is also called Babaji. I decided to go and see him to ask him about the mysterious *ashram* of the Hīmalayas, hoping he would be able to give me some sign that would permit me to reach my goal and to meet the masters of my Master. The swami of Ashahabal had traveled through the Himalayas all the way to Kalimpong and Sikkim, even staying for a while in Gangtok, which is the capital of Sikkim.

On the night before I visited him, I found myself once again on my houseboat, reclining on the cushions and listening to the soft murmur of the breeze which passed through the open window, and hearing the faint paddling of oars and the song of a boatman. Just as I was about to fall asleep, I thought of the swami whom I had not yet met. They had told me that he was a great admirer of Jesus. In that semiconscious state which precedes real sleep, I imagined that I was talking with him, and I asked him this question: "Do you think that Jesus really existed, or do you believe he was merely a myth?"

Then, in my half-dream world, I answered myself, as though I were the swami: "Just as we have the right to doubt his existence, so Jesus had the right not to exist."

This answer seemed so extraordinary that I woke up. I had uttered the question before falling asleep, but the answer had come when I was sleeping. I wondered whether the swami was responsible, but then I

realized that neither he nor I had spoken. Perhaps the reply had come from that region where the two of us are one, where we are nobody, or where we are with Jesus.

Although it was a fair day, the road was dusty and the gardens were full of noisy people. They were dressed in colors of all descriptions—red turbans, dark fezzes, karakul fur capes, astrakhans, yellow tunics for the women, jewels, and heavy bracelets. It was almost impossible to pass through the crowds.

The place where the swami lives is solitary and remote, and it was necessary to cross over several ravines before reaching it. From time to time I paused to look at the outline of the mountains and pine forests that surrounded me. Thousands of wild flowers covered the ground and perfumed the air. Finally I came to a simple entrance, over which was placed the inscription, "Shri Ramakrishna Mahasammelan, Ashram-Naghdandi-Ashahabal."

I passed through this gateway, descended a ravine and then climbed a short slope which led to a number of buildings. A little distance beyond, on a flat stretch of ground, there was an immense tree under which a strange immobile figure was sitting on some mattresses. I approached slowly and sat down to observe. The figure was surrounded by a number of half-savage and naked persons with long hair like lions' manes, hardened with cow dung and colored with saffron. Their bodies were covered with ashes, and I presumed they were disciples of the immobile figure.

I continued to watch this man as he meditated. He had an extravagant beauty. He was very thin, had a cloak hanging over his shoulders, and his hair fell in two fine tresses down his back. He had a classical profile with high cheekbones and enormous dark eyes, which were open but unmoving. He looked as though he were gazing over the tops of a clump of pine trees which were swaying in the wind. His hands meanwhile lay listlessly in his lap. The expression in this man's eyes was astonishing; his gaze was fixed and open, but he looked like a dead man. And then I realized that, although he seemed to be staring intently over the tops of the trees, he in fact saw absolutely nothing. I experi-

enced the same horrible feeling I had felt at Rishikesh when I had watched the Swami Sukhdevananda emerging from his trance. There was the same submerged atmosphere of the tomb, and of an open sarcophagus containing the bodies of the living dead as they walk through zones beyond this world; the same smell of legendary fruit and the same smell of death and of graveclothes. Suddenly I remembered my dream, and I shuddered when I thought that Christ may have been like this when he was taken out of his tomb and taken over the deserts to ancient Kashir.

The air was heavy, and the disciples tried to refresh him with fans made of peacock feathers. Then I heard a weak sigh emerge from that figure, and his eyes began to look as though they were opening for the first time, although in fact they had not yet closed. Then, at length, he looked in my direction, so that I could see his eyes straight on. His glance seemed to go straight through me and to carry with it a feeling of unconsolable sadness, mixed with a touch of tenderness and compassion. This lasted for only an instant, but I felt deeply touched. But at the same time I felt confused and repelled by this atmosphere of decrepitude and physical decomposition.

With some effort, I pulled myself together and noticed that a faint smile had appeared on the face of the swami of Ashahabal. Then I heard him asking me to approach and speak. He was now almost completely out of his trance, and could pay attention to visitors or pilgrims. I told him of the dream I had had the night before. He glanced steadily over the tops of the pine trees, but this time there was intelligence in his eyes. All he said was, "There are some who believe in dreams."

The disciples remained silent. We all seemed to be completely alone, for no one else came, and evening was approaching. I breathed deeply, smelling the air perfumed by wild flowers and the resin of the pines, and once again spoke.

"You've been to the high Himalayas," I said. "Could you tell me if you have ever come across some secret monastery, one of those Siddha-Ashrams which are mentioned in the old texts? I have come from a faraway country in search of the monastery in which these old

sciences and powers are preserved. I think such a place exists, but I do not know the way. Could you direct me?"

The swami took a long time in answering, as if he doubted my motives. Finally he began to speak again, and his voice was very soft.

"Your dream is curious. As I said, there are people who believe in dreams. In Banaras there is a famous writer and thinker called Gopinath Kaviraj; in one of his books he mentions a very ancient and mysterious institution called the Jnana Ganj. I think that Gopinath Kaviraj's master was initiated in one of those secret *ashrams* in the Himalayas. Perhaps you had better go and see him and ask him about it. You had better go to Banaras."

The Cave

Before taking the swami of Ashahabal's advice to visit Gopinath Kaviraj, I wanted to go up north to the high Himalayas, especially to Amarnath, which was where the sanctuary of Siva's lingam was located. That was why I had gone to Kashmir in the first place.

For a guide I chose Kamala, a tall Moslem with an aquiline profile and with intelligent and sympathetic eyes. We agreed to go by way of Pahalgam, a town thirty miles from Srinagar and the usual point of departure of pilgrimages to Amarnath. The first night out I slept in a tent very like one Babar and Genghis Khan must have used. It was set up by the edge of the river, and very early in the morning I arose and inspected the ponies and the other components of my caravan. The *lalarogam*, or man whose job it was to tend the ponies, was called Mohandu; Abdullah was the name of the young boy who helped him, while Abdalgani, who had a devilish face, was put in charge of provisions. In addition to his duties as guide, Kamala also served as cook.

It was still dark when we left Pahalgam, and the mountains and forests that surrounded us were invisible. Our first stop was Chandanwari, which was seven miles distant, but we did not reach it until nearly noon. Instead of resting there, we decided to push on so that we could stay that night by Lake Sheshnag, which was another six miles farther on. The road grew continually steeper and more difficult. Sometimes I rode on my pony, but more often I walked like most of the Hindu pilgrims who were moving along this road with their walking sticks

and their foreheads painted with marks indicating that they were followers of Siva. There were whole families, including women and children, and the old people were carried in a kind of palanquin called a *dandi*. The scene seemed biblical. At one point I noticed a group of Mohammedans climbing an enormous rock by the edge of the river; the men would gain a foothold by grasping the branches of some low bushes and then they would help their numerous women and children along. These men all wore turbans and long cloaks of many colors, while their women had their faces veiled. The wind, which was very strong, would blow their garments, and as they clambered up the difficult path the bracelets on their hands and feet would tinkle musically. Some walked barefoot, but most of them wore thick shoes with pointed toes that curled up. My companions and I had the same kind, and we also had *pulas*, which are hooks for use in climbing the ice. The beards of the Moslem men flapped in the wind, as did their garments, but before reaching Sheshnag they had all left us; they of course were not going to Amarnath, which was the goal of the Hindu pilgrims.

It is thought that Shankaracharya built all these places of pilgrimage in India, which stretch all over the subcontinent from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin. Perhaps he believed that the act of making pilgrimages would give India a certain religious and political unity. At any rate, year after year, the Hindus from the north travel down to the south and bathe in the waters of the three ancient seas which meet at Cape Comorin, while the Dravidians of the south go all the way up to the Himalayan snows in search of the sanctuaries of Siva and Vishnu.

As we continued our climb upward, the river fell in increasingly steep cataracts as it forced itself through great slabs of ice. Whenever I took a drink from the river, using my cork hat for the purpose, I noticed how much colder the water had become. At length we reached a very steep precipice, which had to be climbed by following a zigzagging path that passed through the pine forest. This place was called Pissu Shati. In the Himalayas, vegetation is found at great heights, unlike the Andes which are almost completely barren. The

atmosphere of the Himalayas is also far less rarefied than that of the Andes.

Nevertheless, the climbing was extremely difficult. I proceeded on foot at a very slow pace, hardly aware of the dramatic scenery or of the River Lidder two thousand feet below. By this time we had climbed from an altitude of nine hundred feet to twelve thousand feet, and the horses had to stop almost at each step. At long last we reached the summit and found it covered with small light blue flowers, which looked like butterflies in the afternoon sun.

Already the shadows had grown long, and the area at the top was occupied by a number of pilgrims who had decided to stop there for the night. Standing on a rock at the edge of the abyss was a monk in a saffron robe, who was leaning on his stick and gazing at the colors of the sunset. He was absorbed, praying or perhaps dreaming, and the wind made his body sway like a leaf.

Finally, after dark, we reached Sheshnag Lake. It was entirely barren of vegetation, for we were now at an altitude of thirteen thousand feet and felt very much aware of the ice fields that surrounded us. There was a camp at the edge of the lake, and I could just make out the outline of some tents and could hear the noise of bells and the braying of mules. From time to time I could also hear the sound of men insistently repeating their prayers in loud voices.

By the light of a fire, my companions put up my tent, and Kamala began to cook. While waiting, I walked over to the edge of the lake to watch the moon rise over the mountains. For a long time nothing happened, but finally the pale silver light, rising over the icy peaks, fell over the lake. Around me the pilgrims were singing their old songs of the valleys to the south and of the deserts of central India. They had to be brave to sing in these dead heights, where they had only the icy Olympian gods for an audience.

* * *

I woke up at four o'clock in the morning. It was completely dark and the moon had set, but it was time to begin the last stage of the

journey to the Amarnath cave. The wind was cold and penetrating, and I pulled my blanket tightly around me. Kamala then told me that he was going to remain behind, and so my new guide was the "pony-walla" Mohandu who, along with Abdalgani and the young boy Abdullah, made up the party. The first two or three hours of our journey were completed in total darkness, but by about seven o'clock the first rays of the sun had begun to appear over the hills. These hills were now utterly barren and devoid of vegetation, and from time to time I noticed a small hairy animal with round eyes who, when he looked at us, would emit a sharp whistle. This animal was the marmot. As the sun rose the air became warm, and I was finally able to remove my blanket, although I continued to wear my astrakhan fur cap. Just before noon we arrived at a plateau, which contained a number of springs. Most pilgrims and caravans stop and spend the night here before continuing on the next day, but I wanted to press on towards the high mountains. Nevertheless, we rested for a few moments to give the ponies some water to drink, and I noticed a group of barefooted mountain women coming toward us from the opposite direction. With their weather-beaten faces, they looked tired, but their eyes were full of curiosity. At length the child Abdullah approached one of the horses and kissed him on his forehead. After that, we moved on at a gallop, because we had to reach Amarnath by the early afternoon.

Soon we reached the highest point in our journey, the Mahagunus Pass, which is at an altitude of some fifteen thousand feet. Here the ponies had to walk slowly, for the climbing was very difficult. We found another group of mountain women clustered together by some rocks at the side of the path, and they too looked at us with curiosity. Abdalgani then gave me a small onion, which he told me was good for the heights. He did not realize that I was used to mountaineering in the Andes.

The worst part of the journey, however, still lay ahead. As we continued on, the path became increasingly steep and narrow, and at one point it skirted the side of a high peak, leaving a sheer drop of several thousand feet on the other side. Here Mohandu stopped the ponies and signaled me to dismount, for it was impossible to con-

tinue on horseback along this path. From there on we had to go on foot, and the climb itself was frightening. I avoided looking over the abyss for fear of vertigo, and I knew that the slightest misstep might mean my death. Then I suddenly saw a group of men descending in the opposite direction. They had long beards and red robes and they carried walking sticks. They came down so rapidly that it looked as though they were skipping over the surface of the ground, and their foreheads were painted with horizontal white lines, which denoted their membership in the cult of Siva. I have no idea how they got by me, for the path was wide enough for only one person. But somehow they did. They skirted along the edge of the precipice, and as they went by I noticed that their eyes looked glazed or fixed. Moreover, they seemed immensely joyful: they were returning from Amarnath, and as they descended from the mountain they chanted the thousand-and-one Sanskrit names of God.

Finally, with one last effort, we turned the last corner and emerged on the other side of the mountain. From here on, we had to cross glacial fields. The ice glistened in the sun, and the air was thin and pure. After a little while we encountered another strange person, evidently a swami; he had a curly beard and wore a saffron-colored robe. When he saw that I was having difficulty walking across the glacier, he got up and accompanied me without saying a word. Directly ahead of us was the face of the mountain which we were approaching. After a while I saw something that looked like a shadow on the side of this mountain: it was the cave of Amarnath, the legendary sanctuary of Siva. As we gradually drew near, the air seemed to be full of thousands of minute vibrations, as though a thousand invisible bells were ringing. And then I noticed some birds which looked like doves: they flitted in and out of the mouth of the cave and then finally came out towards us as if they were welcoming us. In the meantime I too had begun to feel light, as though the burden of my weight had fallen from me. In the bright sunlight the white snow seemed to be alive, and the *mantrams* which the holy man at my side had begun to recite seemed to vibrate across the open spaces.

At the entrance of the cave were a number of Sivaite Brahmins

whose duty it was to guard the icy lingam and to preserve the great secret of this cult. I gave them a respectful greeting and then passed into the sanctuary itself. The floor was covered with flower petals, and the air was thick with the smoke of incense and sandalwood. In the center rose a giant white stalagmite, which looked like a column of fire which had suddenly been frozen. It represented the phallus of Siva, emerging from the feminine organ, or *yoni*, of Siva's wife, Parvati. But the image of this cave celebrated more than mere sexuality, or even creation. It did indeed represent these forces, but it also represented the Absolute, for despite its creative activity, the creative force maintained its deathless integrity. The lingam of Siva has remained erect in the *yoni* of his wife for endless ages, and the two have constituted a unity as old as the sacred mountain which encloses them.

Thus the same mystery of the Elephanta cave in the harbor of Bombay has been repeated in an icy cave in the Himalayas. For there, in the main chamber of the Palace on top of the Tree of Life, two people have met and embraced. They have been searching for each other for a long time, but at last they have met. Their joy is so great that they weep for gladness and their tears become the stalactites or snow petals in the cave of Amarnath.

One of the priests of the temple then touched my head with sandalwood and drew three parallel lines, which symbolize the cult of Siva, on my forehead. I turned and started to leave the cave, but on the way out I met an individual covered with furs who suddenly took my arm in a feverish way and cried out: "Kailas! Kailas!" He then pointed towards the wall of stone that enclosed the ravine, indicating that beyond it lay the trans-Himalayan plateaus and Tibet.

I wondered whether the cave inhabited by the masters of my Master would be like the one at Amarnath, and I imagined that it too was illumined by an icy light—by the white sun of the tremendous god who creates and destroys without changing himself, and who loves and hates without the slightest sign of emotion.

The Icy Lingam of Amarnath is said to change size in accordance with the waning and waxing of the moon. At the time of the full moon this icy phallus reaches its greatest erection; then the gigantic stalagmite begins to rise within the dark interior of the cave, attempting to reach the roof, as if it were attaining the limit of its own universe and filling the closed dome of its own creation. Then the cold flame vibrates in the heart of the ice and in the silence, as it has done for thousands of years, ever since the mountains rose and the waters receded from the face of the earth.

The Christ of Atlantis

The first group of Jews to arrive in India in large numbers appeared in the year 70 A.D., after the second destruction of the Temple. They landed in the southwest part of India in what is now Kerala. This region, bordering on the Arabian Sea, was the legendary Ofir from which King Solomon procured his ivory, sandalwood, peacocks, and monkeys. Solomon's temple was adorned with sandalwood from Malabar, and Israeli and Arab merchants frequently traveled to India on business. A second wave of Jews arrived in India during the fourth century A.D., and the last came during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When the Jews first arrived in Kerala nearly two thousand years ago, they went to Thiruvanchikulam, the capital of the ancient Perumal emperors, which is today known as Cranganore. They were received in audience by the emperor, who gave them land near a southern village called Parur, and there they built houses and synagogues. Three hundred years later the emperor gave Joseph Rabban, who was the chief of the Jewish community, the title of Srinadan-Moplah and made him a noble of his court. Generally speaking, the Jews were called Anjuvarnar, which means the fifth caste in addition to the four castes of Hinduism. Nevertheless, the emperor's order creating Rabban's title was engraved on a copper plate according to custom, and was written in Vattezhuthu, the ancient popular script in the region south of Tanjore.

In Cochin, in the state of Kerala, there are two Jewish communities

who live in separate streets and who have separate synagogues. These two communities are known as the white Jews and the black Jews. The black are doubtless those who arrived after the destruction of the Temple and who were given land near Parur. They wear the indigenous dress of the country and are as dark in color as the Dravidians, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish them. The white, on the other hand, are those who arrived in later centuries; they dress in the Western manner, their houses are built in the Dutch style of the seventeenth century, and even their synagogues have Dutch candelabra. The Dutch, like the Portuguese before them, had been settled in Cochin for some time.

There is virtually no intercourse between these two groups of Jews, and the whites tend to look down on the blacks; they claim that the blacks did not in fact appear after the destruction of the Temple. If their assertion is correct, then it would be necessary to explain their Judaism in some other way. If they were in fact natives of India who were converted to the Jewish religion, they would be very interesting, since Judaism is not generally speaking a religion which can be adopted freely. Like Brahmanism, Judaism has its roots in the blood of the people of Israel. In the same way, Brahmanism is based on the Brahmanic caste, and no one who does not belong to this caste or to the Kshatriya or to the Vaishya caste can be a Hindu. For this reason, neither of these religions has been interested in missionary work.

The white Jews of India have never been able to assimilate themselves completely, and they have never been able to exert much influence on the national community, as they have done in nearly every other country to which they have gone. The difficulty they encountered in India was simply that Hinduism had precisely the same basis of race and of theocracy as Judaism had. As a result, it was a closed circle, and the Jews were unable to penetrate it.

There is yet another theory, which holds that the Jewish race originated in India centuries ago. According to this idea, the Jews were members of the Dravidian race. Like the gypsies, who belonged to a lower caste of Hinduism, it is thought that they departed from

India and migrated towards the West. The extraordinary persistence of the Jewish community as a community may have had its basis in the Hindu caste system. Like the gypsies, they do not ordinarily mix with other peoples, and the reason may be their subconscious memory of the caste system in the country of their origin. The return of the Jewish communities to India in later centuries may thus be likened to the pilgrimage of the Parsees, who came back almost by instinct in search of their roots.

This theory ties in with the legend that Jesus Christ also came to live in India after he was lost in the Temple at the age of about thirteen. As has already been noted, this legend asserts that Jesus spent seventeen years in India, finally returning to the country of his birth to preach the doctrine of salvation and to assert that he was the Son of God. This idea of being an incarnation of God had been common in India for centuries, and thus a declaration like this would have surprised no one in India. Vishnu, Siva, Rama, Krishna, and Buddha had all been reincarnations or *avatars* of the Only God, and even today some say that a living god may be found in Shivananda's *ashram*, in Rishikesh.

Christ belonged to the sect of the Essenes, of which John the Baptist was also a member. John baptized Christ in a river of Israel, and the ceremony employed was very similar to that which is performed to this day among the Hindus when they take their ablutions in the sacred rivers of India.

A further aspect of this legend claims the existence of a book in a Lamasery or convent near Himis on the frontier of Tibet and India. A part of this book is supposed to have been written by Jesus and to contain an explanation of his doctrine. The book as a whole is said to contain fourteen chapters and two hundred and forty-four *slokas*. The story of Jesus is also related in a curious manuscript called Nath Namavali, which is preserved among the Saddhus of Yoga Nath, in the Vindhya range of mountains. This text asserts that Jesus, or Ishai Nath, which is the name used in the text, came to India at the age of fourteen, and that, after sixteen long years of concentration, he came to understand that Siva was the great god. After this he

returned to his own country and began his preaching. Soon, however, his brutish and materialistic countrymen conspired against him and had him crucified. After the crucifixion, or perhaps even before it, Ishainath entered *samadhi*, or a profound trance, by means of Yoga. Seeing him thus, the Jews presumed he was dead and buried him in a tomb. At that very moment, however, one of his *gurus*, or teachers, the great Chetan Nath, happened to be engaged in profound meditation in the lower reaches of the Himalayas, and he saw in a vision the tortures Ishainath was undergoing. He therefore made his body lighter than air and passed over to the land of Israel. The day of his arrival was marked with thunder and lightning, for the gods were angry and the whole world trembled. When Chetan Nath arrived he took the body of Ishainath from the tomb and woke him from his *samadhi*, and later led him off to the sacred land of the Aryans. The account continues with the assertion that Ishainath then established an *ashram* in the lower regions of the Himalayas, perhaps in Kashmir, and that he established the cult of the Lingam and the Yoni there. Finally, at the age of forty-nine, Ishainath willingly gave up his body, having gained control over it through Yoga.

In the "Song of the Yogi," which the Natha Yogis sing, there are also references to Jesus and to John the Baptist. Some of the words of the song are these:

My friend, to what country did Ishai go, and to what country went John?
My friend, where is the *guru* of the *gurus*, and where is your mind resting?
My friend, Ishai has gone towards Arabia, John towards Egypt.
My friend, Ishai is the *guru* of my *gurus*. The mind of the yogi rests only
in the Yogi.

In this strange document Jesus is called Ishai Nath, whereas the word Jesus or Jeshua is Hebrew. The same word in Greek is Issoas and in the Indian tongue it is Eeshai or Isha, which means god.

There is also a verse in the Puranas which reads: "Having found the sacred image of Eeshai [God] in my heart, my name will be established on the earth as Eesha Mashi [the Messiah]." Today, when Jesus Christ is referred to by Christians who speak Hindi and Urdu in

India, he is known as Eesha Mashi. The Tamil name for Christ is Kesava Krishna.

The word Essene seems to have no very precise etymology. The Essenes, however, were similar to the yogis of India, and they hoped to obtain divine union and the "gift of the spirit" through solitary meditation in remote places. The word Essene could have evolved from a foreign pronunciation of the Indian word Eeshani. Eeshan is Siva and Eeshani is one who adores Eeshan or Siva.

Thus Jesus is both Siva and Krishna. And so Jesus is the Master of my masters, as the song of the Natha Yogis puts it; it is he that I have been searching for in the mountains and in the ices: the Christ of Atlantis.

* * *

There has been some mention of Atlantis in these pages and it is time its meaning be explained. Atlantis is the remote past; it is the prologue of man's history, a timeless time, itself having no history. It is the dream of Paradise; it is the justification of all myths and of all dreams and memories. What it suggests is that there was once a time when men were gods; there was once happiness and a total existence; there was once an island or an oasis where a lover and his beloved lived together. There is really no geographical location for Atlantis; it is simply a place over the waters, located in a spaceless space, in a squared circle; it is the cavity which exists between the brain and the skull which is a living void. Thus the concept of Atlantis must first be internal.

Atlantis is totality, and in that place, which is also Paradise, animals lived in peace with man; they were his friends because they were inside and not outside of man, and the same was true of metals and plants. But when man lost his totality, the animals and the plants and minerals went their separate ways and turned themselves into his enemies. This act of partition was the immolation of the body of the son. It was the immeasurable tragedy of the sinking of Atlantis and the loss of Paradise.

So long as man is divided, living outside of totality or unity, he is born under the influence of a particular constellation and is dominated by an animal which may be his servant or his enemy. The effect of the epoch of the Holy Ghost, or of the Great Resurrection, will be to reincorporate all of these animals, vegetables, and minerals with man, without negating any of them. This will be the epoch of Him-Her, when, at last, the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral will be reunited and reincorporated in the totality of the Christ of Atlantis.

The View from Without

Once I dreamt that I had died, and I found myself sitting on a road, with my legs crossed in the lotus position. I was trying to concentrate and to meditate, fixing my eyes on the space between my eyebrows. Although I made a great effort, I was unable to succeed. Then a figure passed along the road and stopped to look at me. It smiled and said: "Why do you want to do that if you are dead? What you are doing can be done only in the life that you have just left—within the body. Now you must concentrate outwardly; you must look at the body from without."

This dream made a great impression on me, and for a long time I thought about it and tried to guess its meaning.

In order to understand something about this mystery and to pull back a little the veil which separates us from that greatest of all unknowns—death—it is necessary to consider Yoga and use some of its allegorical and mystical language. There are seven *chakras*—lotuses or centers of psychic force and consciousness—located along an invisible spine in the astral body. Each has its color, letters, symbolic animal, and god. Thus Muladhara Chakra at the base of the spine is a yellow lotus with four opened petals. Around it the Serpent Kundalini is coiled three and a half times.

Psychic channels, called *nadis*, run through the astral body, the most important being Pingala, Ida, and Sushumna. Sushumna runs along the spinal cord, whereas Ida and Pingala are located to its left and

right. These *nadis* and *chakras* have a more subtle and spiritual meaning than expressions like nerves, ganglia, and plexuses.

Sushumna is the path along which the Serpent Kundalini progresses like a sleeping beauty of the forest. Once Ida and Pingala merge, and their wedding is blessed by Sushumna in the temple of the Manipura Chakra at the navel, all three are united, thus allowing Kundalini the Serpent to reach the Ajna Chakra, which is the space between the eyes. This *chakra* has only two petals and it is there that the Eternal Lover lives who is capable of helping us reach heaven. Wearing a white robe, she leads us by the hand up the last steps that separate us from heaven; she leads us towards the throne, towards the coronary *chakra* which is called Sunya or emptiness. This *chakra* is the Brother of Silence, Sunya-Bhai, the Hermaphrodite. It has a thousand petals and contains all of the letters there are and all of the *mantrams*. Whoever attains the Great Emptiness by reaching the mysterious cavity that is said to lie between the brain and the skull, whoever overcomes rational consciousness and moves to a point nearer the Collective Unconscious, has a halo around his head or a protuberance like Buddha's.

A mysterious aspect of this whole process is that although the Serpent Kundalini climbs up the spine, it only stretches one-half of its length, while the other half remains coiled around the base. Thus, it is like the Libido, which is at once active and in repose. It is both alive and dead, creating and dissolving at the same time. In the same way those who have attained liberation continue to be active in the world, and the Buddha who reached Nirvana was still an influence on earth.

The symbolism of Yoga aims at totality; it incorporates everything, including the earth and the sky, the animals and the gods. It is a picture of the Universe. Consider, for example, the symbolism of Pingala, that narrow channel which is located on the right side of the backbone. It is considered to be red, since that is the color of the sun, and it is masculine. Ida, which lies to the left of the column, has a pale color like the moon, and is feminine. Together, Pingala and Ida constitute Kala, or Time. Sushumna, which is the channel running up the center

of the spine, destroys Kala or Time, because Sushumna represents the secret path towards timelessness. Pingala is also the River Jumna, while Ida is the Ganges, and Sushumna, the River Sarasvati; these three being ancient seas which meet in the extreme south of India at Cape Comorin, where Kanya Kumari, the Virgin Princess, sleeps. These three, accompanied by a mysterious fourth, proceed across the body of India, uniting the Arabian Sea, the Sea of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean with Mount Kailas in the Himalayas, where the god Siva lives. This mountain represents the coronary *chakra* or Sunya. Thus altogether, like the body of a man, the map of India shows erect temples at both extremes.

The stars are the *chakras* of the macrocosm; the Milky Way is Sushumna, Ida, and Pingala. Kundalini passes through the skies like the Serpent of Creation. The worlds of the sky are psychical and physical emanations of the body of the cosmic Christ, whereas man is Christ incarnated. While we live, we exist within a small body, which in turn is within a larger, the Universe. Thus space travel corresponds to the movement of a small cell passing from the kidney to the heart. Whereas a mental trip to the sun or the moon, such as is taken by the yogis of India or by my Master, is both a trip from one *chakra* to another, and a psychical trip through the constellations. Yet, in either case, the voyage always has to remain within the great mental body. Like those Tibetan *tankas*, which show the Wheel of Life located within the belly of a demon, we are locked in the Universe, and the Universe in turn is within us, each of us at the same time having an objective unity. Perhaps death will be an escape from this prison, a departure as much from the small body as from the large, so that we will be able to contemplate the Demon from without.

While we live we all yearn for heaven; once dead, we will probably be nostalgic about the body and consider that physical existence was heaven. Perhaps we shall return reincarnated; perhaps not. All we know is that death is a departure from physical life. The condition of the two is that of essential oppositeness, and as a result there is no possible communication between those who are dead and those who

are alive, for each is concentrating in a different direction: those who are alive look inward, whereas the dead look outward.

The only possible clue to the mystery seems to be that ancient science of Atlantis, Yoga, which allows the Serpent to uncoil at one extreme and to remain simultaneously coiled in the other. It is a process of being alive and dead at the same time, of looking inward and also outward; it unites the Ego and the Self. That is the only possible path, a narrow pass over the mountains which has been lost to man for centuries.

The City of the Eternal Wedding

From the cave of Amarnath in Kashmir, I decided to continue my pilgrimage to Banaras as the Swami of Ashahabal had advised. But before going there I decided to visit the temples at Khajuraho. These temples are famous all over the world for their erotic sculpture, and are considered one of the highest expressions of the medieval renaissance in India.

Prior to that time Indian art had reached its highest point during the Gupta period of the fifth century. There is nothing quite like the art of that epoch. The sculptors were able to express the mystery of primary forces; they were almost like gods. The stone heads of the Buddhas reflect an infinite pity and a serene acceptance of pain: they express the extraordinary attitude of one who has entered Nirvana at one end of a cord, while remaining voluntarily tied to the earth at the other. The sculpture at Khajuraho, by contrast, seems to have an almost decadent refinement. The carved bodies seem to have been formed by a wind blowing from some other universe, from an almost devilish paradise; their naturalness seems to have been achieved by a forbidden magic. There is nothing like them anywhere else in the world. These figures are not naturalistic, but they are almost painfully attractive.

The earliest temples of India were almost devoid of sculpture, and in primitive Buddhism the image, called Murti, was prohibited. But by the time of the Gupta period it had returned with great forcefulness. This image is Maya, or the Universe, and it is a symbolic expression of

the thought of God. The anonymous sculptors who created these carvings intuitively seemed to understand this thought, and during this golden period many statues of this kind were carved all over India. In the western part they may be found at Ellora and at Elephanta, in the south at Belur and Halebid, and along the eastern shore at Bhubaneshwar, Puri, and Konarak. Who these sculptors were, no one knows, but they really seem to have known the secret of creation. They knew that the Mother, Shakti, one day awoke and looked at herself in a mirror, and then in a second and then in a third until the world was created.

Whereas Shakti, the Mother, is the ultimate model of all the statues, the model of the temples themselves is Mount Kailas. All the temples of south and central India attempt to reproduce the shape of the mountain. The temple also has the shape of the body of a man, and the circular disc at the top of the dome is the halo or coronary *chakra* over the head. Moreover, the form of the temple is always the same. On the outer walls there are always hundreds of images reflecting war, life, death, love, procreation—in a word, Maya, or Illusion. But inside, in the most secret shrines, Siva meditates as a lingam. As has already been explained, the lingam symbolizes ecstatic concentration; it is the erect dorsal spine, along which the fire of the Serpent rises towards Samadhi. The interior Self or god remains unchanged in a profound dream, unaffected by what goes on externally, by its own creation which is reflected in the images on the outer walls of the temple.

Foreigners who visit Khajuraho usually cannot understand it. It is naturally difficult for a Western Christian to appreciate a religious temple decorated wholly by erotic figures. Frequently these visitors are scandalized; they depart full of righteous indignation and write angry articles condemning Indian morality. In the past the Moham-medans were also offended, and with gunfire and hammers they destroyed many of the temples.

Khajuraho was built in a beautiful place, in the midst of forests surrounded by low hills, with a river passing through the center. Yet all of the palaces that were built there have now disappeared, as have

over, the face of the male lover expresses no desire, but total absence. He is shown as though he were dreaming, with only one part of him remaining to sustain his lover, giving her protection and infinite tenderness. He appreciates her sacrifice and the pain she endures for his cause; he appreciates the technique which she has perfected in order to liberate him. She has wholly descended to the human level, to the level of flesh, for service and for maternity. Thus she is the creation of the world. He meanwhile is beyond her, he is beyond everything at the other end of the cord; and he loves her with an infinite tenderness since he loves her as himself. The male lover is at once ubiquitous and surrounded; he is immobile and abandoned; he holds his lover between his arms and penetrates her. He incorporates her within himself, but at the same time he always keeps her without.

The terrifying mystery expressed in these images seems to reflect the intuitive consciousness or Collective Unconscious of the whole people. Nevertheless, India has already forgotten their meaning. These statues are now a cause of shame to many modern Indians. Yet they are her greatest glory. For sex was sacred; like everything in India, it was symbolic.

The whole world may be conceived of at Khajuraho, except that here the final stages are emphasized. When Krishna said, "I am the desire, the lust which procreates," this statement represented the first creation. The Father coupling with his Daughter who as his Wife produced a Son, the world. This union was sexual, but the sex of the world, considered as illusion, is the furthest reflection of the original act. It is the last of the series of mirrors. The statues at Khajuraho, which are representations in stone of Tantric thought, represent the attempt to return to the union of the Self and the Ego. It does not use sex to procreate, but to destroy creation and to dissolve Maya. It is a forbidden, sterile love; it is magical. It is love without love.

On the temples of Khajuraho there are no statues of children, for the product of the love portrayed here is not a son of the flesh, but the son of death. The product of this love is a lotus flower; it is an ark which allows man to pass over the terrifying waters of death.

At its height, Khajuraho was a sophisticated and almost super-civilized city. As a result, the kind of love that is portrayed on the walls of its temples is likely to have been essentially aristocratic and selective, like a religious initiation for a minority. Such stratification, however, means little in India, for status is temporary and fluctuating. Thus hedonism in India has not quite the same dangers it has for others, for at any moment it can be cast off at will, like a stone thrown into a pond.

The men who practiced the secret love at Khajuraho had to be well versed in various arts: they had to know how to decorate the bodies of their lovers, they had to know all about jewels and food, and they had to be experts in their appreciation of femininity. The women, in turn, were trained from adolescence in the mystical art of love. Their training was quite different from that of a geisha, however, for their art was essentially religious. The woman was not taught to satisfy man physically, but to touch his intimate centers, or *chakras*, and to impel him towards the Self. Thus the woman taught man to abandon her physically and to incorporate her spiritually within himself, so that he married not a woman but his own soul.

Although this religious art had an ancient heritage, coming from an unknown past, in Khajuraho it reappeared as a reaction against the devotional or *bhakti* tendency which had invaded India. It was in fact Tantrism with its accompanying Kaula and Kapalika cults. Kaula is the same as Shakti, the Serpent, and her opposite is Akula, or Siva. The union of these two produced Inkaula, or the Hermaphrodite. The rite which produced this result was called Kolamarga. Kapalika was a much more secret cult than Kaula. It probably involved human sacrifice and also the eating of the flesh and blood of the victim. Those who followed this cult lived secretly with their initiated women, who were called yoginis. The most ancient temple at Khajuraho is dedicated to sixty-four of these yoginis, and is called Chausath-Yogini. The members of the Kapalika cult went about covered with ashes and with their heads shaven, except for a piece of hair which hung down at the back of their necks. They also wore jewels in their ears and

around their necks, and they carried a skull in one hand and a staff in the other. The Kapalikas believed that the center of the individual, or of the Self, was located in the *yoni*, or sex, of a woman. By meditating on it, they believed they could attain liberation. They simply considered that all men were Siva and all women Parvati. This cult is considered to be very ancient.

The compiler of these Tantric practices in the seventh and eighth centuries was a king called Indrabhatti, who in his work describes his initiation through an act called Maithuna in Sanskrit. His daughter, the beautiful Laksminkara Devi, was said to be one of the most advanced and enthusiastic members of this aristocratic cult of magic sexual love.

* * *

It is always important to remember that this rite was essentially a forbidden love, *contra natura*, for in it everything is contrary to the apparent purpose of creation. It has nothing to do with the procreation of the race. Yet Krishna himself, the blue god—that Pan of India or Christ of Atlantis—gave precedence to the act: he loved a married woman and he danced with her in a jungle within a circle surrounded by *gopis* or servants who were the shepherdesses of Gokul. The secret wedding that took place in the gardens of Vrindavana was the same as the Tantric Maithuna.

Such magic love has to be antisocial and illegitimate; moreover, it is sterile since it is only internally procreative.

Marriage as an institution was not considered advisable for either yogis or yoginis, unless they were used to living a double life.

This mystery is expressed in a sublime way on the walls of the temples of Khajuraho, especially in the expression of the figures who love each other in a way that is at once frenzied and static.

The Tantric hero is forbidden to practice love passionately or compulsively. This is a rule permitted only to the woman, since she is the active participant and because she represents the feminine aspect of the universe and the creative side of Siva himself. She is Shakti or Kundalini. Shakti is in fact the creator of the world, or it is at least

through her that God creates the world. Shakti is both the Demiurge and Maya, or Illusion, since Illusion is the multiplicity of forms. God creates the world because of love, or rather out of his love for his Shakti or his active catalyst. Love is always an illusion or a dream; and so God does not really participate in creation. Instead, he remains untouched and immobile. This concept is represented again and again in the images of Khajuraho.

This metaphysical concept of woman playing the active role while man plays the passive is not usually found in the imperfect human world. Nevertheless, in the Tantras the woman is reincorporated into divine life. The Tantras see Shakti, or the Mother, in everything; they consider her to be the pillar of both the macrocosm and the microcosm. Thus liberation can only be achieved through contact with woman in this world, by means of a sexual pilgrimage.

In Tantric yoga, women first have to be recognized externally and then accepted as the only possible means of attaining unity. Marriage with woman is the first step, but it must always be a symbolical marriage.

The Wedding

In all of this it must not be forgotten that what is important is the symbolic meaning or metaphor. Although written language and sculptured images may appear to be heavily overladen with sex, they are so only in appearance. On its highest plane, when it is practiced among the more sophisticated members of the cult, the Tantric ceremony is only a symbolic act, for Maithuna occurs only within the body of the man.

The human body is considered to contain two essential elements: Siva, or the static principle, and Shakti, the dynamic principle. Siva, who is masculine, resides in the empty space which is found between the brain and the skull, and which is called Sunya. Shakti, which is feminine, is the Serpent, Kundalini, which is coiled around the base of the Tree in the Muladhara Chakra. The right side of the body is considered to be masculine and it contains Pingala, or the sun; the left is feminine and holds Ida, or the moon.

What Maithuna really represents is a union of opposites within the same body. The union of Siva and Shakti links Ida and Pingala, and Kundalini with Atman. There are several weddings in one, and opposites are progressively united. By the union of these opposites, totality is achieved and the Hermaphrodite is produced. And on top of the Tree of Life the source of eternal life and eternal youth is found. There the mind and vision become one, and particular organs lose their identity. This is the achievement of Sunya, or Emptiness; it is the

Brother of Silence or the Nirvana of the Buddhists. According to the Tantric cult of Mahayana Buddhism, this Emptiness is Compassion, and for that reason the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara entered Nirvana only at one extreme of the cord, and he always remained bound to the world by the other. This union of opposites, perhaps, has the form and sound of the syllable OM. When extremes are united each fulfills the desires of the other.

This wedding with oneself is a marriage with the Serpent. Once the rites are fulfilled the body grows wings, and the soul is covered with a tunic which allows us to go on living after death. It allows us to enter the state of continued consciousness even after the physical body ceases to exist. The wedding is also a resurrection.

In India Tantrism has led to excesses, and to orgies and aberrations. Such a development was probably inevitable in this dangerous and complicated symbolism; nevertheless, the Tantrism of the Left Hand asserts that the road to liberation excludes nothing. It claims that self-denial and asceticism are absurd, since the Supreme Emptiness achieved in Sunya produces the same results, only more satisfactorily. Yet the Tantric method is the most difficult of all, for it demands continual vigilance over all parts of existence. It is the science of Siva, the Serpent.

The Face of the Betrothed

Whoever has achieved this mystical marriage has a face of dark stone. Slightly inclined, with the eyelids half closed, the face seems to be looking at what is happening within the head; it seems to be listening to the echoing steps of the sleepwalking Virgin who has come up from the depths and who is proceeding along secret corridors, passing old tombs and palaces along the way. The lips of this face are slightly open, revealing a faint smile which seems to be a mixture of pleasure and pain, or of shadow and light. These opposites are like alternating thoughts which follow each other in a circle within the head. Thus, as he makes love to the person within himself, that action is reflected on his face which is at once divine and sensual. One side of his face is dark and reflects the twilight of death; the other side is alive. His is a face of a being who has penetrated the mystery of death, and, having been bitten by the Serpent, his face reflects the poison. This division into light and darkness also reflects the paradoxical birth of the son of death, who is also the son of eternity. With its half-opened eyes, this face seems to look through all experience. This face also seems to understand the very act of creation; it sees the children leaving the father, and simultaneously experiences their joyful return. It is a face of a being who first descended into the earth at the roots of the Tree and to the hell beneath it, and who then followed a seemingly endless pilgrimage until finally he climbed to the top of the Tree of Life and met there, in the Hall of the Palace, that person for whom he has been

searching for such a long time. And the happiness of their encounter produced tears which are the fruit of the Tree of Life.

Two stony tears fall along the cheek of this married figure. One belongs to him, the other to her. This stone face was sculpted more than a thousand years ago in the city of Khajuraho.

The Song of the Sufi

Continuing on my pilgrimage to Banaras, I stopped in Kampur in order to visit the Sufi master, Sri Radha Mohan. The word Sufi means soft or smooth, like lambswool. In the evenings this master usually walks in the gardens of his house, carrying a rosary in his hands and murmuring prayers and *mantrams*. His friends often come to pray with him or to meditate with him. In moments of silence he closes his eyes, as if to suggest that he is almost in a trance, or that his unspoken words come from unattainable depths in the subconscious.

In the evening, with the moon casting shadows through the mango trees, Sri Radha Mohan lay down on his cot in the garden and called me to him. He signaled me to sit down opposite him so that, as he explained, the vibrations of his heart could reach me. Then he began to sing softly in a deep voice. His song was a tender lament, full of nostalgia and suitable to the moonlight in the evening. It told of a shepherd who was looking for Krishna and who, after passing through many valleys and over mountain passes, one day entered a house, asking for food. At that very moment Krishna himself passed along the road. Later on the shepherd heard how he had missed the encounter, and he uttered this sad lament: "I have lost my heart along the way, and have never found it again."

The Great Kumbh Mela of Allahabad

At certain intervals of time, when the stars combine in a special way, the people of India foregather at the city of Allahabad in order to bathe at the place where the River Jumna joins the Ganges and disappears in it. Both rivers come from celestial abodes, the Ganges having its source at Mount Kailas in the great head of Siva. Yet there is another river which attends the wedding of these two others at the Sangham, or junction, at Allahabad. This is the River Saraswati, which no one has ever seen.

For this festival, caravans come from every corner of India. The roads are clogged with pilgrims, who come on foot or in carts and on camels and elephants. Many others come by train. Altogether, when I was there, there were four million souls who had gathered in the city of Allahabad. Here and there along the river's edge, tall iron towers were erected from which the crowd could be watched and its movements controlled. Finding myself in the midst of this immense crowd, I felt like a straw in the wind; I was lost, yet I was moved by an indefinable feeling of respect for the immense forces which were united there. I was just one individual jostled in a crowd of thousands. Soon a procession of Saddhus approached the river bank. These Saddhus, or holy men, were naked; their bodies were covered with ashes, and their faces were painted green. Their chief, or *guru*, rode on an enormous elephant, whose feet were hobbled by chains and who therefore advanced jerkily, trying to balance himself. From time to time

he raised his trunk and snorted. The *guru*, who was completely naked, and who represented Siva in the procession, was covered with an unbelievable mixture of colored pastes, saffron, and excrement. He was preceded by dancers carrying swords and striking angry blows at the air before them. Following them marched a band of musicians playing drums and flutes, while behind came fakirs rolling on beds of thorns or walking along with their tongues and arms pierced by nails. The procession concluded with more elephants which, in spite of their awkward movements, never brushed against these men. Something within them seemed to tell them not to.

Just then, at the height of this great *mela*, or gathering of unbelievable persons, disaster struck. Somewhere, for a reason no one could explain, someone had taken fright, and like a forest fire the terror spread. Someone had fallen in this moment of panic and others tripped over him and also fell onto the ground. Almost immediately the whole multitude went mad, and hundreds were stepped on and trampled in the dust. In a matter of minutes the Kumbh Mela of Allahabad became an unexplainable panic, a collective terror with the pointless death of hundreds. All around me lay wounded in improvised carts, the dying and those who were already dead. There were old men and children, young girls and old women. An old woman passed by, crying for protection; she had lost all her people, and since she came from the extreme south of India she knew no one in Allahabad. But nobody made a move. Everyone was simply stunned and blinded, not knowing what to say or think, and not knowing why this tragedy had occurred. After a while, however, calmness gradually returned, for these are a people made for suffering and misfortunes. Thus they were able to tell themselves that it was all for the best, for those who had died on that day in that place would be blessed by the sacred rivers and by the conjunction of the stars in the heavens.

At noon I decided to visit the camp of the Yogis and Saddhus. Here all the well-known *gurus* of India, accompanied by their followers and disciples, had gathered. They were like an army of magicians and saints living in tents. Many were already in a state of trance,

looking as though they were dead, or as if they had been resurrected into a timeless time. The atmosphere was thick with the smell of burning incense, and the area was crowded with thousands of curious and reverent people. These swamis and yogis had met to pray and to repeat the *mantrams*; they were praying for those who had died in the Kumbh Mela and for those who had passed before them. I was told that among the *gurus* was Ananda Mai, the Mother, and that Shivananda was also expected and that the Swami Laxmanju was coming from Kashmir. But I saw none of them there.

After leaving the encampment, I decided to take a boat and to submerge myself into the waters of the river. But along the way I was approached by a naked Saddhu, who stopped me. He was a young man with sad eyes, and he held onto me by the arm. "Why is there no justice in the world?" he asked. I looked at him closely and then realized that he was weeping. His question apparently referred to those who had died earlier in the day.

I didn't know what to reply, and so all I said was, "How can you expect to find justice in Kaliyuga?"

He remained on the edge of the shore, watching my boat leave, and in the silence his tears kept rolling down his cheeks. Finally he left and lost himself in the crowd.

Then, in the conjunction of the visible Ganges and Jumna and the invisible Saraswati, I took off my clothes and submerged myself under the water.

The Holy City of Banaras

But it is in Kasi, or Banaras, that bathing in the sacred waters really reaches its apogee. For centuries the Hindus of India have been seduced by the image of the river, which is so like life itself. No two people ever swim in precisely the same mixture of water, but the river remains; it has a name and a unity. Thus the question which the Hindu puts to himself when he submerges in the river is whether, like the river, he also has a unity or identity. Like the river, we are never the same; we are formed by hundreds of different streams, by an infinity of egos; nevertheless, there is always something which gives us the illusion of wholeness, and that is the name. The Hindu, however, is even doubtful about the permanence of the name, for he is already partly dissolved in the waters.

At sunrise, multitudes of the faithful go down to the *ghats* of the Ganges. Passing down through the narrow streets of the old city, they reach the wide staircases that descend into the grey water of the river. Along the steps the Brahmans sell rosaries and recite prayers. Where the steps descend into the water, the faithful walk into the river, half naked or with robes that billow about them. The women do not take off their saris, with the result that they cling to their bodies as they submerge into the water. The ritual of bathing is very complicated. First some water is taken between the hands, which is then allowed to slip between the fingers while the individual murmurs ancient Sanskrit prayers and formulas. The head is then dipped into

the water several times; and then the whole body becomes covered. Everyone gargles and drinks the water. It must be remembered that this dark fluid is full of mud and urine, and the remains of those who have died. Some soak themselves profusely, while others simply sit with crossed legs, half submerged in the water, and meditate. Yet others dive into the stream and swim vigorously in it. There are many boats about, usually going upstream and full of children and tourists. Sometimes something floats by that looks like a tree trunk, bobbing or revolving on the surface of the water. It is not in fact a tree trunk, but a corpse which is being swept towards the sea, and which has to cross all of Mother India if it is not first eaten by the freshwater fish who inhabit the sacred river. Such a corpse means that the dead person was a leper, for in India the corpses of lepers are never burned but are thrown into the waters of the river.

All along the shores there are funeral pyres for the burning of the dead. Those who have died are brought there by their relations or friends. First the corpse is bathed in the river, and then the Brahman repeats a few *mantrams*. The body is then placed on a pyre of sandalwood or of ordinary wood, and then the fire is lit. The relatives or friends stand around, occasionally poking the ashes to make sure that the corpse is entirely consumed. This ritual usually takes place at early dawn or at dusk, and then the river bank is illumined by hundreds of these fires.

All along the river bank, and in the steep and narrow streets of the city, there are hundreds of temples. These are consecrated to every conceivable god; one, for example, is dedicated to the goddess of smallpox. There is also a Nepalese temple, covered with erotic figures carved in wood; and there is another dedicated to Kali, in which animals are sacrificed and where blood runs down the marble floor, while dozens of monkeys jump and shriek on the roof. In one small street, which is so narrow that two people cannot pass abreast, there is a small opening in a wall through which can be seen the interior of a temple where the lingam is dripping with oil, milk, and the juice of fruits. Female hands devoutly wash it and pour syrup and perfume over it. At a little

distance away, the sound of incessant drumbeats accompanied by prayers and laments may be heard. This is the House of the Widows, which is inhabited by women who have no future in this world. Since they have not fulfilled the rite of Sati, as women used to do centuries ago, that is, since they have not joined their husbands on the funeral pyre, they are now considered to be dead and have to implore the charity of the passerby and to live out their agonized existence in this nightmare city.

The streets of Banaras have nothing to do with the terrestrial world; they are indescribable and escape comparison with anything else. They are at once horrifying and seductive, repulsive and fascinating. Whoever has walked through the streets of Banaras with open eyes and an open mind must be aware that he has observed a truly grandiose sight. These streets reflect the misery of creation and also the great triumph of spirit over misery. Charity and inhumanity, pity and horror, the petty and the cosmic, all pass along the streets of Banaras. Moreover, there is a tremendous noisy laughter with which everything vibrates, and which seems to say, "Look upon this farce, this pain and misery and grandeur, and laugh, because none of it really exists; we are all comedians playing a great comedy called Maya."

There is also a good deal of magic and illusion in Banaras. For the misery and sickness which precede death in Banaras are part of the religious pattern of India. Thus these dying lepers and monsters gaze about them with illumined eyes and peaceful faces; they smile because they are convinced that they are playing their divine role well. Normally a difficult role, it is made easy for them when they accept it as part of the great comedy.

Turbaned dwarfs with twisted legs sit in the street, smiling with eyes full of a fundamental complicity. Passing by them comes another man who is naked and daubed with blue paste. He rises from the ground and throws himself forward with a lurch; then, rising again, he repeats the action. In this way he will finally reach the sacred river, although there are many blocks still ahead of him. For a whole morning I was followed by a small child who kept touching my feet. It was impossible

for me to get rid of him, because whenever I gave him money he simply asked for more.

All along these narrow streets, which are shaded by enormous trees, monkeys play and leap about, and cows solemnly pass by. Everyone has to wait for the cows to move, since they have a kind of perpetual right of way. The streets are also lined with hundreds of shops and stalls, for Banaras is the center of the silk industry; and the saris of Banaras, with their gold embroideries, are marvels of Indian artisanship and are famous all over the world. There are also, along the river's edge, dozens of luxurious palaces which have been built by the Maharajas of the various kingdoms of ancient India. The open porches of these palaces have been dedicated by the Maharajas to the use of the people from their district when they pay a visit to Banaras. Here, as elsewhere, the promiscuous life of India is emphasized. For in India everything is done in common, and the Indian is always surrounded by people. He lives, loves, eats, sleeps, and dies communally and therefore he has had to preserve an inward, spiritual privacy. Virtually every Maharaja or rich Indian merchant has built a palace in Banaras, but these are all on one side of the river; on the other side, completely alone, is the palace of the Maharaja of Banaras, who does not belong to the Kshatriya caste but to the Brahmanic caste, for, according to popular belief, he is the direct descendant of Siva on earth.

But more than anything else, people come to Banaras to die by its sacred waters, for the Hindu who dies there expects to liberate himself from his *karma*, or at least to reach a superior incarnation in the next life. This belief explains the illumined faces and the happy eyes of those who have overcome the pain of the flesh and the misery of the world. They have already passed through the curtain of filth and horror and live spiritually in a world of divine light. The curtain of dirt and misery which is found in Banaras hides diamonds and pearls; it is a penitential mask.

All of Banaras is affected by the idea of *karma* and of reincarnation. *Karma* is the spiritual law of cause and effect: the actions of today produce effects in the next incarnation. For the Buddhist this is a

perfectly mechanical law, whereas for the Vedanta philosophers it is a kind of judgment. Their view is that Brahma-Isvara, which is that aspect of Brahma that is concerned with creation, weighs and computes the action of an individual being, so as to establish his *karma* in his subsequent incarnation. The word *karma* means "act," and some Vedanta scholars believe there is a collective *karma* operating within a particular *kalpa*, or period of time. In this way, each individual action would affect the whole of humanity.

For the laws of *karma* to be fulfilled, so that a final liberation may be attained, a Great Wheel is required: the small Wheel of Life is not enough. What are really required are five thousand wheels; an individual must live five thousand lives. It is this concept which fundamentally divides the Western world from India. Although I am able to convince myself intellectually that reincarnation takes place, for it certainly seems likely, I realize that it is one thing to believe rationally and another to be convinced of an idea inwardly. Thus, even though I say that I believe in reincarnation, my soul and my blood will not accept the idea. At heart, I can have only one life and no more. The modern Indian, by contrast, may claim that he does not believe in reincarnation, but at the root of his being he is committed to five thousand lives, and this concept will rise to his consciousness at crucial moments, especially at the crisis of death.

If we think of the implications of these two ideas, we will discover the real basis for the gulf which separates even those of us who live in South America from India. This basis is the fundamentally different attitude taken towards time by the Westerner and the Indian. An Indian saint does not have to act as though he were a saint through and through. Saintly in some things, he can also be something of a sinner. The sinner, in turn, can be something of a saint. What this means is that there is no need to rush, there is no need for a sudden and definite conversion. There is plenty of time—there are five thousand lives—in which to reach the ultimate goal. The West, on the other hand, is always troubled by a feeling of urgency. The Western saint is always a complete saint. One of the worst things that one can say of a Westerner is

that he is a hypocrite, but hypocrisy does not exist in India. People may seem to be hypocritical, but the concept has no meaning to them. Thus the Western man is whatever he is to the core; everything that he does is defined and dramatized, and individuality is everything. In India the complete opposite obtains: the Indian may have thousands of individual lives, but, because of this plenitude, none of them counts for much. The Indian does not love or hate, he does not live or die. He merely glides like a river towards eternity. His individuality is dissolved a thousand times on the sandalwood pyres, and he melts into the infinite forms of Maya, or Illusion.

Westerners want to make themselves eternal as individuals. The Hindu, on the other hand, wants to save himself from eternity: he fears that eternity will be something like an unending insomnia. Yet this concept is relatively modern, for the ancient magicians and Siddhas of India once tried to make themselves as eternal as an icy sphinx.

* * *

On the following morning I decided to visit the Pandit Gopi Nath Kabiraj, who was the real object of my trip to Banaras. I found that he lived in an old two-story house, built in the center of an abandoned garden. When I arrived I gave my name to a servant, and then was directed to climb a narrow stairway up to the attic which was occupied by the Pandit. He received me sitting on a white sheet, and he was naked to the waist. Across his chest was stretched the white cord of the Brahman, and round about him were scattered books and papers. Gopi Nath Kabiraj was a famous Sanskritist, and a former professor at Banaras University. He has written many important works among which are *Visuddhananda Prasanga*, *Surya Vijnana*, and *Yogi Raja drisaja Visuddhananda*. In one of these works he speaks of his Master and of a very secret society located in the Himalayas and called Jna Jna ganj.

As I stood before him I noticed his strong features; he had large and intelligent eyes, and his beard, like his hair, was turning white. He signaled me to sit down on the sheet, and seemed somewhat impatient

to hear what I had to say. I then told him that a swami from Kashmir, whom he did not know, had told me to come and see him in hopes that he could give me some useful information. Gopi Nath Kabiraj nodded and waited for me to continue.

"I come from very far away," I said. "From the Andes of South America, and I have come here in search of the masters of my Master. I am searching for an old secret society which is hidden somewhere in the Himalayas."

A brief light seemed to glitter in the eyes of the Pandit, which seemed to suggest that he thought I was yet another madman in search of illusion. But the Pandit did not say anything of that sort; instead he handed me an open book and showed me a photograph.

"Yes, that all exists," he said. "And, as you say, it is somewhere in the Himalayas. Look at this." He then showed me the photograph of a man with a long beard, who was covered with a cloak.

"This yogi is eight hundred years old and he lives somewhere in the Himalayas, in one of those secret *ashrams* which you are looking for—in a Siddha-Ashram."

I then smiled, for this seemed too much even for me, but the Pandit continued: "Don't laugh. I have seen these men often: they come to visit me in their ethereal bodies, and very interesting things can happen. Some time ago, in 1940 or 1941, a magazine called *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society* published an article by a German, who had traveled to Tibet and who underwent very interesting experiences in connection with these occult societies."

I then asked the Pandit how I could find this magazine, and he suggested that I visit Professor B. L. Atreya at the University of Banaras. He also told me about another book concerning the secret societies of the Himalayas and written in the Gujarati language. It was called *Brahmanda no Bheta*.

Gopi Nath Kabiraj then closed his eyes and swayed gently from side to side. Finally he spoke again. "Well, do come back to see me. In the meantime, however, you should visit a friend of mine who is a great astrologer and whose name is Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri. He lives right

here in Banaras, in a place called Rampura. Before seeing you again, I would like to know more about you through your horoscope. Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri will prepare one for you. So go and see him first and then come back here."

That same afternoon I took a small tonga, or cart, which was pulled by an ancient horse, and went out under the rain of the monsoon through narrow streets and curious byways until I finally reached the house of the astrologer, Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri. For a long time I knocked at the door, but finally I heard steps within and the door creaked open. A stout Negro, with a huge key ring hanging from his waist, asked me what I was looking for and then, apparently knowing my business, he signaled me to enter, and guided me past piles of wood and machinery collected in a storage room. He then led me up a narrow staircase to the room of Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri.

I entered the room and found the astrologer to be a very sweet old man, with a thin body and face. With him there was a young child who turned out to be his grandson. His name was Gopal. The astrologer told me he knew who I was and why I had come, for Gopi Nath Kabiraj had sent him a message. He therefore skipped the preliminaries and simply said: "I am not going to give you a horoscope, because you don't need one. I will tell you, however, that you should stop looking outside for what is already within you. Inwardly you already possess Mount Kailas and can find there the masters of your Master."

We remained sitting in silence, as the afternoon shadows gathered in the upper room of this house in the sacred city of Banaras. Gopal, the grandson, lay stretched out on the floor, and the astrologer caressed his head for a moment and then almost seemed to wink at him.

"I think we ought to tell our friend of a technique by which he can learn more about what is inside him, don't you think?" Gopal nodded his head approvingly, and the astrologer continued:

"This technique is called *shambhuvi*, which means Siva. It has also been used by the Buddhists. For one week you should walk with a slight weight on your head, placed slightly towards the back of the skull. You can use a stone or any other object. Then for the second

week you remove the weight, but open and shut your eyes very slightly several times. Then in the third week sit down, without doing anything or thinking about anything, with your eyes closed. Then you simply wait. Do this every day for three weeks before going to sleep."

In this way my interview with the astrologer ended. When I left I felt that I had met a superior being and that I had encountered the soul of a very good and wise man. I can still see him sitting there with his grandson in the shadowy upper room of the house in Banaras. He has now been dead for many years, and I never saw him again.

* * *

I then went back to visit Gopi Nath Kabiraj, but could not converse with him, since he was practicing his day of silence. I told him, however, about my visit to the astrologer and about the practices or techniques he had suggested I follow. The Pandit clapped his hands with applause. He then wrote on a piece of paper the following message: "Go to visit the Swami Bhumananda, who lives in the Kalikashram at Kamakhya, which is near Gauhati on the road to Assam. He will be able to give you a good deal of useful information, because his own teacher was initiated at a secret Siddha-Ashram in the Himalayas."

Before leaving Banaras I decided to visit my friend, the Frenchman, who was living in the *ashram* which is kept there by the Mother, Ananda Mai. *It was a beautiful place, built on the river's edge, and it had a medical dispensary for the poor in its precincts. When I arrived I found the extraordinary Ananda Mai sitting in a room, surrounded by flowers and musicians. Soon, however, she rose and walked towards a small door in the rear. Just before she disappeared she turned back for a moment, and looked intensely at me. Her look seemed to suggest everything—a sea of life and death, and of love.*

I then went down to see my friend in his subterranean cell. He was sitting half naked, and was as exhausted as I was by the sticky heat of the monsoon season. There was nothing in his room except a small photograph of the Mother, Ananda Mai. I noticed that over the photograph was stretched a thin black line, and I approached it to look at it.

Then I noticed that this line was a hair and I glanced at my friend.

"It belonged to the Mother," he said, blushing.

We sat together for a long time in silence. It had been over a year since we had first met at Dehra Dun. I looked at him and again noticed how thin he was, and then he told me that the Mother had suggested that he go for two years to her *ashram* in Almora, and to stay there in total silence. He then added: "But life is so heavy! Only death will bring us peace."

We then rose and walked out onto one of the terraces of the *ashram* which overlooks the Ganges, and we watched the water go by as it had done for centuries and ages, coming from its spring in the head of Siva and passing towards the sea and the infinite. Yet, though seemingly the same, this river was never the same; the logs and animals and corpses that passed along on its surface marked the rhythm and breath of India, always the same and always different.

We both stared at it for a long time.

The Valley of the Gods

I had written to the Swami Bhumananda, asking whether I might visit him and talk to him about his teacher, and the secret *asbrams* of the Himalayas. But while waiting for his answer I decided to go to the Kulu Valley, or the Valley of the Gods, to rest for a little while and to concentrate. I knew that the region was very beautiful and little visited, for it was well within the range of the Himalayas and its roads were steep and difficult.

The Kulu Valley is inhabited by an ancient race which probably first came from Rajasthan. The Aryan features of the race are very marked, and the Gadhis, who are nomadic shepherds living in the high mountains, look like ancient Greeks. They wear long cloaks of white wool, and a kind of skirt that hangs over their naked legs. These garments are held in place by thick cords, which they tie around their waists.

After climbing up an extraordinarily steep road, I finally reached the Rathang Pass, which is at a height of 13,500 feet. Beyond that pass lay Lahouli and Spiti which are on the borders of Ladakh and Tibet, and inhabited by lamas. The scenery at the top of the pass was very like that of the high Tibetan plateaus. It was also extremely cold, and the wind was blowing so intensely that I joined a group of Gadhis and took refuge with them within a circle of sheep and ponies. They gave me some food to eat, and then afterwards they descended on the other side of the pass. I remained behind alone, gazing at the blue mountains in the distance and the light as it changed over the glaciers. It seemed

to me as though I were in a land where shadows walked barefoot over the snows.

The wind at those heights is so severe that it can easily cause frightening illusions, and I therefore decided to walk back down to my cottage before nightfall. The path was very steep and rough, and I had to climb over and around boulders along the way. It was extremely difficult to move, and I had to exercise great care. But then, as I was slowly inching along, I suddenly heard an acute whistle, and at the top of the chasm I saw a figure moving with incredible speed. Soon he came down and passed by me, jumping from rock to rock. As I watched him I perceived that he hardly even touched the rocks, while all the time he emitted his piercing whistle. He seemed to be a kind of lama, or monk, but I couldn't really tell because he disappeared from sight so quickly. I sat down on a rock, sure that I had been a victim of a hallucination. Then I found a stone tablet, half buried in the snow, on which Tibetan pilgrims had inscribed: "*Om mane padme hum.*"

The Kulu Valley is called the Valley of the Gods because each village in this region worships a different god, or Rishi. In the village of Manali I once saw one of these gods, the Rishi Manu, undergoing a great punishment because he had not been able to bring the rains necessary for the growing of rice. A great procession was formed, and the wooden image of Rishi Manu was placed inside an ancient temple located in the forest outside the town, and dedicated to the goddess Kali, who is the Devouress. This temple contained a black stone, like an altar, and it was so stained that it is probable that human sacrifices were once performed there. The priest or "interpreter" of the god, who had led him to this temple, remained outside, and then, to the frantic beat of drums, he began to dance and leap about. Dressed in a rough cloak, to protect himself from the cold night air, he soon fell into a trance, trembling like a leaf and foaming at the mouth. This was considered an assurance that it would soon rain.

On the following day the rains fell all over the town of Manali.

Many strange people live in this town. An Anglo-Indian major has lived there for a long time, married over the years to a number of

different native women. By now, however, he has grown old and is somewhat ill. He is attended by a Saddhu, who is a man who had renounced the world, and who wears a saffron-colored robe. This Saddhu brings the major various herbs which he has gathered on the mountains, and small pieces of paper on which he writes *mantrams*. The major is a convert to Hinduism, and he keeps images of Indian gods in his room. I have heard him reading at night to a small child and a native woman, who sleep with him in the same room. He reads English stories, which he translates into the language of the region. One evening I was passing by his house, and, noticing that the blinds of a window were open, I glanced inside and saw a naked woman who was drying her arms and legs with a towel. She was singing softly, and I thought that she must be the major's wife. Then the next day I found this young girl in the mountains, shepherding a flock of sheep and wearing a red kerchief on her head.

All the women of this region wear bright colors, and have deep-set eyes. During the summer nights they gather in the forest, and play flutes and beat drums. But most of the time these young shepherdesses are off alone on the mountainside, tending their flock and gazing towards the distant summits and glaciers.

One day when I was climbing an extremely steep slope, as most are in the Himalayas, I found myself in a very awkward position, holding onto a root with one hand while my feet lost traction in the crumbling earth. I was on the side of a steep precipice, and, since I had no idea how to move, I began to wait for a miracle to happen. And in due course this miracle came in the form of a gentle shepherdess, who had seen me and who had glided across to me to help. She gave me her hand and I did not let go of it until we reached a safe place. She had guided me with precision along the steep face of the cliff, all the time laughing gaily. Her red kerchief blew in the wind, and from time to time I could see her bare legs as we climbed. When we stopped I saw her deep joyful eyes, inviting me to an adventure more exciting still, right there on the steep slope among the wild pines which grew at the edge of the precipice.

supreme weakness. Yet I was also weighed down by my hope of reaching Mount Kailas in search of the mysterious Order, and of that secret monastery where I would be able to find the masters of my Master.

That night I had a strange dream. I was standing near a garden wall, over which the branches of some trees were extended. I shook one of these branches and some small white fruit fell down. These suddenly turned into small animals or insects, which scuttled off towards the house. I followed them, and soon found myself within the house towards which they were approaching. I then put my arm out of the window, grabbed two of these small insects and took them into a room, where I left them. Somehow I understood that they did not want to remain there and that they were astonished at my attitude. One of them escaped under the door which led out of the house. I then secured the door closely, so that the other one could not escape. It then reproached me mutely for having separated it from its mate. When I woke up I remembered the revulsion I had felt when I had pulled those two insects or animals into the room.

The Gate of Tibet

Meanwhile the Swami Bhumananda had written to me saying that he was waiting for me to come to see him, and that he would tell me all he could about the secret *ashram* where his teacher had been initiated. I therefore went down to Calcutta in order to proceed on that trip. But when I got there I realized that the roads were impassable. The monsoon rains had inundated the country for miles around. The Brahmaputra had overflowed, and for days on end the monsoon skies were heavy and ominous. There is no sight more extraordinary than these skies, especially at sunset, for then they are painted with almost impossible colors: gold and purple and emerald.

I soon grew bored with my delay in Calcutta, and became restless to visit other parts. I therefore decided to go to Kalimpong, which is the great gateway to Tibet. Hundreds of caravans loaded with merchandise pass through this place, and the streets are full of Tibetans who carry daggers at their waist and prayer wheels in their hands. They are a joyful and strong people, wearing fur caps and long canvas cloaks. The hills outside of the town are covered with small flags bearing religious images, which are placed there so that their prayers may be wafted off to the mountains by the winds. Everywhere this religious spirit is present, and everywhere is heard the phrase, "*Om mane padme hum.*" The prayer wheels both in temples and houses are kept in continuous movement, either by the faithful or by streams of water.

Kalimpong is also where Professor George Roerich lives. He is the

son of the Russian painter, Nicholas Roerich, who emigrated from Russia with his family during the Revolution. He built his house in the Kulu Valley and was converted to Buddhism. His son, Professor Roerich, is a Buddhist scholar famous for his Tibetan studies. His translation of the *Blue Annals*, and his studies of Tibetan painting, are known all over the world. He lives in Kalimpong with his mother who, as often happens with Russians, has highly developed psychical powers.

One evening I visited Professor Roerich and took tea with him in his study. His face has a Mongolian cast, and he has a small pointed beard. While we were being served tea, I tried to ask him about the secret *ashrams* of the Himalayas, and told him something about my search. To my great surprise, he then said: "Yes, these *ashrams* certainly exist. I have investigated them, and, since I know Tibetan and Sanskrit very well, I have found mention, in the texts, of four secret *ashrams*. One near Shigatse, another near Mount Everest, a third near Mount Kailas and a fourth in Tholingmath. These are the Siddha-Ashrams to which you refer. I don't believe that Madame Blavatsky lied when she said that she had been to one of these Tibetan Siddha-Ashrams. Some people claim that Blavatsky, who was the founder of Theosophy, had never been in Tibet, but in several memoirs of English military officials, who traveled in this region during her lifetime, there is mention of various meetings with a Russian woman who was traveling through the desolate Tibetan plateaus accompanied only by native servants."

The Panther's Eyes

Since the roads and passes of this far northern country were blocked by landslides, I decided to go down to the south of India, stopping first at Orissa and Madras. In Madras I had the address of Swami Janardana, who is the spiritual leader of an organization that has many followers in Chile. It is called Suddha Dharma Mandalam. Janardana believes in the Siddha-Ashrams, and he believes that the new Messiah, called Bhagavan Mitra Deva, lives in a secret place somewhere in the Himalayas.

But first I decided to investigate the ancient land called Orissa, which is inhabited by people who practice ancient rites, and where Tantrism is kept alive along the jungle coasts. Having first gone to Puri, I decided to walk all night along the beach that leads to the ruins of the Konarak temple. From time to time I grew so tired that I wanted to lie down, but every time my native guide warned me not to, telling me of the danger of serpents and of the tigers of Bengal. I therefore continued on, half naked and sweating profusely. Occasionally, as we passed through a village, someone would take a cutlass and slash into one of the big coconuts, so that I could drink its milk. The monsoon had blocked all the roads between Puri and Konarak, and that is why I walked along the beach. All through this starless night I could hear the sound of drums and of songs coming from the jungle.

I was utterly exhausted by the time I reached Konarak, and could barely crawl about the huge stone Temple of the Sun. This Temple,

like some of those at Khajuraho, is covered with Tantric sculptures and is designed to represent an immense chariot. All along its base are huge stone wheels, and it is pulled towards the rising sun by stone horses. Within the chariot is the internal sun, and its progression towards the east, coupled with the Tantric sculptures, represents the fusion of Him with Her, the fusion of the extremes of the cord which are always separated from each other. But the statue of the sun, Surya, which used to stand in the center of this gigantic stone chariot of Konarak, or Black Pagoda, has been lost or destroyed.

Since I hadn't the strength to return on foot along the jungle-lined beach, I hired a small cart with its own charioteer, who directed the water buffaloes along the beach, back to Puri. There, on the water's edge, I decided to take a small cottage and to remain for a number of days. Swimming naked in the warm sea, I soon regained my composure and was happy again. It was different from swimming in rivers, for, in India, river-bathing is always ceremonial or sacramental. In Allahabad and in Banaras, I should have liked to plunge into the waters and to have swum energetically back and forth across the river, enjoying the happy exercise and feeling the blood still young in the veins. But such an act was never possible. Liturgy has ruined the happiness of a whole people, and has destroyed its animal energy. There is, of course, a different energy, which represents a joy quite different from the primitive kind I enjoy in the sea. This is an old and legendary force which is intimately mixed with the blood of the spirit.

From time to time I noticed a number of wooden boats, sailing by the beach. They had curved keels, were high out of the water and were propelled by long oars. One day I swam up to one of them, and the fisherman inside handed me an oar to help me climb in. This I did, and together we went out to sea to fish. All of the fishermen had dark skins, and one of them had monstrously swollen legs because of elephantiasis. Even out on the ocean, I could smell the strange odor that is peculiar to the inhabitants of Orissa; it is somewhat acid, but it is mixed also with sandalwood, betel, resin, and sea water.

Later, when we came back, I stood up and dived into the Sea of

Bengal, descending to its depths and then swimming fast to the shore. When I reached the shallow water I saw a face near me, which kept appearing and disappearing between the waves. I stopped and floated for a moment in order to watch it. Then it too became stationary and floated very near to me. There were two enormous staring eyes and a head covered with black, lustrous hair. This face which stared so hypnotically was that of a native woman who was swimming all by herself in the sea. Underneath the water I could see the dark shadow of her naked body. As I walked up onto the beach I saw that the face was still there, looking at me fixedly.

By now it had grown dark, and I walked barefoot to my cottage, which overlooked the sea. I closed the door and the windows to keep out the malarial mosquitoes. My bed had a mosquito netting over it, but I never liked to sleep under it. Just then I heard a noise by the door, something like the scratching of an animal. I walked over to it and opened it suddenly. There in front of me was the naked woman who had been staring at me in the sea.

Without saying a word, but continuing to stare, she came into the center of the room. I don't know whether I closed the door or whether it closed by itself. We stood staring at each other fixedly, and breathing sharply. She was dark, and her feet were covered with mud. She wore heavy silver and copper rings on her arms and her ankles, and she had others hanging from her ears and one which pierced her fine thin nose. Her forearms were tattooed with strange symbols. There was nothing negroid about her, however; and her lips were perfect. Her damp hair fell over her shoulders, and I could see that her white teeth were regular and strong. But what was most striking about her were her two terrible eyes and her heavy eyelids, which were like the wings of birds. From these eyes came a stare which enveloped all the room, and seemed to devour me.

Very slowly, without making a noise, the woman approached me. She took hold of one of my hands and placed it over her naked breast. Her flesh was as hard as stone, and her nipple almost seemed to cut my hand like the point of a lance. She breathed hard, and exuded a

vapor of intoxicating perfume. She had that sour and black smell of the race of Atlantis; the smell was something like tea or alcohol, a mixture of betel with wet jungle leaves. It was also the smell of a wild animal, something like a sheep or a water buffalo, but more like a panther.

As I did nothing, she went over to the bed and lay down on it, under the mosquito netting. I could see her muddy feet and her long fine fingers. The bracelets she wore seemed like slave chains. She took hold of the head of the bed with her two hands and began to breathe excitedly, while all the time she continued to stare at me. Then she began to move her body in a rhythmic cadence which increased in tempo.

As I stood there, I came to realize that I was in the presence of the ancient savage female. Her behavior was not animalistic or primitive; rather it was the product of a people who have been altered by history and by liturgy; it was the behavior of a race which has known the Serpent. I realized that what this woman wanted to do was to initiate me into the rites of a magic and fatal love, which had its source in the roots beneath the rice, and which was also as precious as a blue sapphire or the feather of a peacock's tail.

The whole room was enveloped in the boiling clouds of her body and impregnated with her terrestrial and ethereal odor. I approached her, and all that night I lay there with a statue from the Black Pagoda of Kono-rak; she was also a siren, or one of the mad and sacred bacchantes who had danced in the garden of Vrindavana.

The Swami Janardana

It is certainly suggestive that the Society of Suddha Dharma Mandalam has so many followers in Chile; indeed it has more there than anywhere else in the world, even including India, where it is relatively unknown. This esoteric organization, like Theosophy, is based on a divine hierarchy of Teachers and Siddhas, whose task it is to direct the destinies of mankind and man's spiritual evolution. This hierarchy is said to have been constituted by the Supreme Guru, Bhagavan Sri Narayana, twelve thousand years ago. According to the Pandit Janardana, that would be only one thousand years before the great Mahabharata war. Information concerning this event may be found in Suddha literature, and there are also references in the Upanishads to the Suddha Dharma, especially in the Adhytmopanishad. The present hierarchy consists of thirty-two Siddhas presided over by Bhagavan himself, who is also known as Kumara, Dakshinamurti and Sri Yoga Devi. These high beings, and those who follow them in sequence, watch over the temporal and spiritual evolution of humanity in the present era of Kaliyuga, and their center, or Siddha-Ashram, is located in a secret place in the Himalayas which is variously known as Uttara-Badari, Ari-Badari, and Yoga-Badari. But it was only in 1915, when this hierarchy was reformed under the name of Suddha Dharma Mandalam, that its existence was revealed to humanity through Sir Subrahmanya Iyer.

Prior to that time, the principles and practices of this philosophy, written in Sanskrit, had been preserved in secret archives in the Hima-

layas. These were then edited by the erudite Pandit K. T. Sreenivasa-charya. The present chief of the Order is the Pandit Janardana of Madras.

The functioning of the hierarchy has been explained by Janardana in his assertion that each epoch has its own *avatar*, or incarnation, of the divinity who, in this case, is Bhagavan Sri Narayana or, in reality, Vishnu. If there were no *avatars*, then men would have no one to guide them and would succumb to their demonic or "asuric" condition, which usually predominates. At any rate, the Amsavatar, or Messiah of our epoch, has already appeared, and is called Bhagavan Sri Mitra Deva. His divine birth took place on the sixteenth of January, 1919, that is to say on a Thursday of the full moon, in the month of Pusha in the year of Kalayukti. He was born to the wife of a member of the *kshatriya* caste in Maharashtra, which is a district of Bombay. The father of this divine creature died very soon afterwards, and one of the high personages of the Mandalam hierarchy took the child and his mother under his protection. A circle of assistants, called Mitra Brinda, was then established around the Messiah in order to help him in his work when he acted publicly to change the course of humanity and to save mankind. For the moment, this Messiah lives in a secret *ashram* in the Himalayas, and from time to time he appears to members of the circle and to the chiefs of the Suddha Dharma Mandalam. He has certainly been seen by Sri Janardana, and perhaps by some Chilean disciples. Perhaps he will appear only internally, changing man's inner heart, but Sri Janardana claims that he will reveal himself physically, in order to change the material destiny of man in a definite way.

It is strange that this religious sect, which is so little known in India, has so many followers in Chile. Doubtless the secret Himalayan *ashram* awakens echoes in the soul of a people who have long dreamed of the legendary City of the Caesars. Moreover, its similarity to Theosophy has made it more acceptable to us than the abstractions of Vedanta or the ascetic practices of Yoga. Finally, my own search for the secret *ashram* in the Himalayas, near Mount Kailas, suggests a similarity of the same legendary dream.

But the Theosophists, like the disciples of Suddha Dharma Mandalam in Chile, have damaged the purity of the Oriental idea by adding Christian and Western traits. Naturally they have nothing to do with the East or with India, with its Yoga and its diffuse and impersonal spirit. Yet, even in India, movements like Suddha Dharma Mandalam have been affected by Westernism. This movement in particular has a quality quite unlike that which is usually found among the Indians. Nevertheless, this is an area about which it is difficult to be precise, and the assertions of Sri Janardana, in particular, are characterized by an Oriental vagueness in exposition and an absence of logical and rational thinking. This may be due to the tendency of the Indians to think different sorts of thoughts from those commonly found in the West. At times I almost think that the Indian does not think with his head any more than he speaks from his throat; his thinking seems to come from his heart, or at least from the solar plexus or from the Muladhara Chakra. For this reason, the Hindu does not discuss or explain; he merely preaches. Whenever a Hindu speaks, he speaks as a Brahman or as a priest, even though he may not belong to this caste. He is never a philosopher, even though he pretends to be one, let alone a logician. He is always a preacher.

After settling in at my hotel in Madras I went to look for the house of the Swami Janardana. It took a long time to find, and I had to search through narrow streets, crowded and bustling with people. At length I discovered it, however, in the rear of a small patio, which was awash with dirty water and occupied by a fat woman squatting over some brass pots which she was cleaning. I presumed that she was the wife of Janardana; at any rate, she pointed towards a narrow staircase, which led up to a terrace where the swami was seated at a table. I followed her directions and found a man with a powerful yet agreeable face, who greeted me with a Western handshake. He was dressed in white, as is the custom in the south of India. When he heard that I was from Chile he brightened visibly, for, not surprisingly, he had a great sympathy for our country. For my part, I also felt a considerable attraction for this person who had for so long tried to connect these two

distant regions of the world. In short, there was very little of the common man in this Madras swami; he was quite different from his countrymen.

This difference was soon demonstrated in what he said.

"Those who talk about dissolving the individual ego in Brahma do not know what they are talking about," he said. "In this world our only weapon is the intellect. Indeed, I will go further and say that spiritual truths can be understood only by an intellect that has become pure. You may say that this idea is modernistic, but in fact it originated in the teachings of Sanatana Dharma twelve thousand years ago. The Yoga that is known popularly in the West, and which aims at a dissolution of the individual ego in a superior ego, is merely the Yoga of Patanjali, which was popularized by Swami Vivekananda. The true Yoga, however, is Suddha-Yoga, which antedates Patanjali. This Yoga is quite different from the later type, for true Hindu philosophy does not aim at the dissolution of the individual nor the abolition of reason. On the contrary, it tries to find divinity within the heart and to make life divine. It is therefore concerned with the transference of the personality center from one point to another, and with the location of those centers. This is very difficult to do, since these centers are at the same time located in a particular place and generally influential over the whole being. Moreover, since the very idea that personality emanates from these centers is hypothetical, I cannot accept the analogy which is occasionally used to illustrate the evolution or change of personality in an individual, and which uses the symbol of the worm and the butterfly and the idea of passing from the one into the other. For, in fact, the metamorphosis may be in quite another direction. In short, I believe in the Individualized Spirit."

Towards the end of my visit the Swami Janardana showed me some phonograph records that had been sent to him from Chile by his disciples. They were recordings of *mantrams*. The swami made me listen to them and told me that he thought they were very good. Then he asked me to enter a small meditation room. There some incense sticks were burning.

Before I left I asked the swami this question: "Where is the secret place where Bhagvan Mitra Deva lives?"

"Near Badrinath," he replied. "To be precise, in western Badrinath."

He then smiled faintly.

"I will go there," I said.

When he said good-bye to me, Janardana did not put his hands together in the *namashkar* of Dravidian India, but, like a European, waved his hand in a vague gesture of farewell.

The Road of the Superman

My next stop was Pondicherry. The *ashram* of Sri Aurobindo may still be seen there. This seer led a most interesting and curious life, although there is a good deal of mystery surrounding his last years at Pondicherry. In his youth Aurobindo Ghose fought for the independence of his country. Originally a Bengali from Calcutta, like Ramakrishna, Rabin-dranath Tagore, and Ananda Mai, he escaped to the south in order to avoid being imprisoned again by the British. In Pondicherry he was given asylum by the French, and there he dedicated himself to the spiritual life and was transformed from a revolutionary into an ascetic. Then he met a strange Frenchwoman of Jewish origin who is now known as the Mother, but who was then married to a Frenchman. Before long this woman deserted her husband so that she could follow Sri Aurobindo and build the magnificent *ashram* that bears his name. After that, Sri Aurobindo more or less disappeared from sight. He installed himself on the second floor of the *ashram* and came down only once a year to receive the admirers who had come to see him. Then he would sit in an armchair as if it were a throne, and would look at them without saying a word. Sri Aurobindo also wrote books, noted for their clear, beautiful style.

In the early years, while Sri Aurobindo kept out of the public eye, the Mother devoted her remarkable energies to the building of the *ashram*. She seemed to be developing a cult to him, and would take advantage of his continued silence. Indeed, some say that Sri Aurobindo

was her prisoner. There are even stories that Sri Aurobindo died and that he was replaced by another man. The young Aurobindo was a dark-skinned Bengali, but the venerable old man who was shown only once a year, and who never spoke, was nearly white.

If that is true it would be a fantastic story; but what I think may have happened is even more extraordinary. I believe that a mythical story was incarnated in two human beings, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In the acting out of this myth, it was she who was active and who built the *ashram*, or terrestrial world. He, on the other hand, remained silent on the second story, acting in quite another sphere. Thus she seems to have been Shakti, Maya, and, above all, Kali.

The mystical role he played is hard to identify, for it was colored by his personal views. He believed for example that man was simply a link in a chain of evolution that would ultimately lead towards the Superman. Sri Aurobindo used to affirm that man would not become a superman involuntarily or naturally, but through his will and the freedom of his spirit. Man was capable, he said, of forming a new physical vessel in which he could be incarnated as a superman. When asked how man could achieve this, Sri Aurobindo would answer, "Through Yoga, which is the science which involves relations with the Serpent."

Thus Sri Aurobindo may have retired to his cell on the second floor of the *ashram* in order to create this new vehicle of the Superman, because there no one would ever see him or know what was happening to him. Hence the physical changes and the whitening of his skin. Yet, at the same time, his mind seems to have decayed. So at the end, he was an archetypal Zero or Old Man of the Days. He had nothing to do with the Mother's activities on the lower floor and with her creation of the *ashram*. In one sense she was able to do with him what she wanted, but in another she could not move him or affect him at all, because he was living entirely within another sphere. He had become nothing.

No one knows whether this is what happened, or whether Sri Aurobindo simply walked too narrow a path and failed to cross the razor's edge. Yet his adventure is intriguing. For here was a man who seems to have given himself entirely over to the creation of a new body so that

the terrible Angel, the Superman, might be achieved. And his method was Yoga and the science of the Serpent, which he had been able to practice because, like himself, it has its roots in Bengal.

Yet it must be emphasized that this is mere speculation, for absolutely nothing is really known about Sri Aurobindo's adventure. Indeed, there is yet another theory, according to which the Mother, who is an expert in black magic, robbed him of his powers and energies, incorporating them in herself and leaving him an empty shell, or living corpse.

At any rate, the activities of the *ashram* today are a mixture of Yoga, technology, and Western sport. I have seen processions of young people of both sexes, wearing uniforms and shorts, marching in the stadium and along the beaches of Pondicherry, singing songs of the Divine Life and practicing *asanas*, which they combine with wrestling and Greek sports. This is considered an ideal life for future humanity and a style appropriate to a society of supermen.

Every morning at sunrise, all the young men and women of the *ashram* gather in a large patio in front of the main building. Then, after a while, a window opens high up, and a very old figure wearing a gauze dress appears. This figure looks down on the young men and women and then quietly withdraws. That is all that happens, and no one says a word. This is the Glance of the Mother, which occurs simultaneously with the rising of the sun.

Later on, just before noon, groups of faithful disciples and visitors enter the *ashram*. They form a long queue, which extends from the courtyard to a central room containing an empty throne, beside which are some young girls holding trays of flowers. Then the Mother comes in, supported by her disciples. She seems to be the image of all history. Her profile is aquiline, and on her head she wears a white silk cap, from which is suspended a gold ring which dangles on her forehead. She also wears wide white trousers. She is the image of the Eternal Return, of all the beings and things within the Great Wheel of Life. Her face seems to contain all mineral, vegetable, animal, and human life mixed together. There is also something inhuman in it: the face of the Mother also reflects cats and fish, robbers and saints.

After seating herself on the throne she begins to distribute flowers, one by one. She takes them from trays held by young girls and gives them to the pilgrims who have come to see her. The ceremony is conducted in total silence: visitors reverently accept the flowers, and the Mother says nothing.

Outside, in the garden of the *ashram*, is Sri Aurobindo's tomb. Since he was a yogi, he was not cremated, but buried. Usually there are a number of disciples and visitors clustered about it in meditation.

Ramana Maharishi

From Pondicherry I traveled down to Madurai, which is farther to the south. One night I went to the great Meenakshi temple, which is one of the largest in all of India. Meenakshi is the name used for Parvati in Madurai, and the temple is dedicated to her. Dressed as a Hindu, I observed the ceremony in which the gods are put to bed. In the central sanctuary a group of Brahmans were beating drums and blowing long, trumpetlike horns, while others distributed sweets and milk. Leaning against an old carved column in that atmosphere, thick with the smoke of sandalwood, I then watched the Brahmans change the clothes of Meenakshi and of Siva, her husband. First the Brahmans took off the day clothes with which the statues were dressed, then they fanned, bathed, and fed them, and finally placed nightgowns over them. The two idols were then left alone to go to sleep in their sanctuary, and to begin their divine love in the secret chamber.

Not far from Madurai is Thiruvannamalai, with its Arunachala hill. At the base of this small hill one of the greatest yogis, or saints, of modern India, Ramana Maharishi, lived and died. I decided to visit his *ashram* and see his tomb, for, like Sri Aurobindo, he was not cremated. When I first entered the precincts of the *ashram* I was struck by its peaceful atmosphere. After walking about for a while, I entered the central hall of the *ashram*. One of the first things I found was the sofa Ramana Maharishi had used during his lifetime. On the wall behind it was a colored photograph which was so realistic that it looked as though this

famous saint were actually present. Ramana Maharishi was particularly honored in India, because he was supposed to have achieved a permanent union of the ego with the Self. He therefore lived and died in public, for when a yogi reaches that state he no longer has to practice mental concentration or meditation; he simply lets himself go and floats in a state of grace. What Ramana Maharishi had achieved was the Vedantic concept of fusion of the Atman with Brahman; this is called *Jivanmukti*, or liberation in life. Thus he used to say to those who lamented his inevitable death: "Why do you weep? I am not leaving; I am here and will always be here; I am incorporated in yourselves." Ramana Maharishi had already become the Atman; he was the Collective Being. This is the ideal of Vedanta; the overcoming of divisions and the union in the Absolute One.

I rested for a while in the central hall, absorbing the peaceful atmosphere of the place. Then a swami came up to guide me around the precincts. I visited a school of young Brahmins—a group of young boys naked to the waist, with shaven heads, chanting hundreds of Vedic verses and Sanskrit *mantrams*. They seemed to be caught up in the rhythmic music, and sang with one hypnotic voice as their ancestors had done for generations.

I was then shown some of the relics of the Maharishi. I held his staff in my hand and felt moved, since the saint's hands had also held it. Then, to my great surprise, I was taken into a small room where I was reverently shown a dark square box. It turned out to be the toilet which Ramana Maharishi had used during his last years. On its cover a stick of sandalwood was burning. At first I was rather offended and displeased at the idea of their preserving this item, but as I looked at the pious faces gazing reverently and tenderly at this holy teacher's toilet, I began to understand something of the real nature of homage expressed by this extraordinary people. For in India there are no divisions; everything is natural and has its place in the cosmos. The natural functions of a man are as sacred and as deserving of respect as his ideas are. There man is not separated from nature, but is intimately connected with animals and monkeys and the rivers and trees. Thus the Hindu is easily

overcome by emotion before objects of nature: for him, a waterfall is as mysterious and as deserving of love and admiration as are the physical functionings of the body or of the intellect. As a result the Hindu gods are materializations of natural forces which have been sublimated by the Collective Soul; and their temples spread over the ground like jungle foliage, and are covered with divine idols which swarm over them like a cloud of insects. In every way the Hindu is connected with the cosmos—through his mythology, his catholicism, and the richness of the Collective Unconscious, which he lives and interprets every hour of the day. For this reason the Hindu needs no diversion to keep him from becoming bored. Whoever is wrapped in the Collective Unconscious cannot become bored, any more than the flowers or the mountains are bored. Only those who have become separated from nature and who have lost touch with the cosmos feel restless.

In this fact lies the almost invincible force of the Hindu, for, almost alone in the world, he is still entirely in rapport with nature and accepts it in all of its forms. His country has been often invaded, but in the long run it triumphs, enveloping the invaders like a jungle or an ocean.

For this reason, probably no one is so well fitted to survive catastrophe as is the Hindu. Urban civilization and city life are still foreign to him; his civilization is one of jungles and mountains. Even a house is foreign to him: it is merely something which protects him from the monsoons, but it has no meaning or character. The Hindu is quite incapable of decorating the interior of a house, since he does not understand its spirit. Nevertheless, a catastrophe, aimed at the destruction of cities, would find the Hindu completely prepared. For India is a great civilized nature, or a great civilization of nature.

Meaningless Faces

Nowhere but in India can one see faces so ancient that they seem to belong to history. Faces with deep-cut features and patriarchal beards; eyes as black as coal and long, curved eyelashes, which elsewhere seem to have disappeared from the earth. Living devils and classical gods are frequently found in the streets; here is a Persian, there an Acadian or someone who has survived from the Flood. The dusty roads of India are crowded with ancient figures wrapped in tunics.

If any one of these faces were to belong to a man from the West, he would immediately be looked upon as an extraordinary being. The reason for this is that, in the West, the face is considered to be an emanation of a man's inner personality. In the West, faces do not grow by themselves. A heavily lined forehead and thick eyebrows suggest a man of demonic powers, while a patriarchal beard and a distant look indicate a man who had experienced all the torments of human life before gaining peace. But in India there is no parallel between the face and the internal being. There the face seems to exist by itself, and there is as much variety and extraordinary development among Indian faces as there is among the immense butterflies that are encountered in the jungles.

It would be entirely pointless to try to correlate these extraordinary faces with an internal, individual personality, for nature is not a person. It is only a mask covering the collective mind.

This peculiarity may explain many features of Indian life: the absence

of manners in India, the absence of individualized forms, and the inability to sense external space and perspective. The Indian has no sense of beauty in its Apollonian aspect.

In years of looking at Hindu architecture and painting, I rarely found anything capable of moving me aesthetically. Indeed, I usually found myself irritated by its profusion of color and forms. Yet I recognized that everything that I saw was archetypal; one temple was the same as another; one swami like another; and each saintly man like all the other saintly men.

Swami Krishna Menon

The next swami I went to visit was Krishna Menon, who lived in Trivandrum, a city on the Malabar Coast, first visited by the Portuguese centuries ago. Like Janardana, Krishna Menon had followers in South America, especially in the Argentine, but the difference between them was that Krishna Menon was a pure Vedantist.

I was sitting with him on the second floor of his comfortable *ashram* when I asked him this question: "Do you believe in existence after death? Do the dead continue to live in some form, and can we meet them?"

Krishna Menon hesitated for an instant and then replied: "Vedanta tells us that life is an illusion and that the individual ego is also an illusion. How then can death exist, if life does not exist?"

Then, after a moment's pause, he continued, "To attain salvation, which is the peace that comes with knowledge, one must first experience the company of wise men." Krishna Menon had encountered his *guru* in Calcutta only once, but that had been enough for him.

I then told him about my experiences in the inner world, and about my "vibrations" and my feeling of being separated from my body. He told me that I had experienced these things because I had probably practiced Yoga in a previous incarnation.

I have often found it curious that Vedantist philosophers and saints, who are otherwise absolute monists, always have a strong belief in re-incarnation. For them, everything is illusion, but reincarnation and the

individual *karma* persist, apparently apart from illusion. Thus I am told that I am suffering from the consequences of having practiced Yoga in a previous life. Yet the only one who can activate Jivanmukti and overcome illusion is a yogi.

Swami Krishna Menon also had to deal with his *karma*, for he was suffering from pains in his legs and had to undergo the traditional Ayurvedic medical treatment of massages and herb compresses, and he had to retire from public life in order to complete this treatment. But that was many years ago, and now Krishna Menon is also dead.

Cape Comorin

The Malabar Coast is very beautiful, especially at the time of the monsoons, which bring out the deep green color of the vegetation, which is not unlike that of Ceylon, with palm trees and coconuts and sandy beaches. The people and villages of the district are very clean, as they always are in Dravidian India. The coast itself is famous in history, for it was here that the ships of King Solomon came, and here the legendary Ophir was located. St. Thomas the Apostle came here, as did the Jews after the destruction of the Temple. The Portuguese also landed on this coast, and indeed it was they who coined the word caste to describe the divisions they observed in Hindu society. The word "caste" really was a Western term, used in reference to the segregation of cattle. Some vulgar Portuguese sailor applied it in the fifteenth century to the Hindus, and thus it has passed down through history. The Indian term for caste was *varna*, which means color.

I made a detour from the main road in order to visit the Courtallam waterfall, which is used by the Hindus for ceremonial baths. Hundreds of men, women, and children go there and stand under the falling waters; they gather there like moths around a candle and grow ecstatic before this symbol of nature's power. I also decided to bathe there, and when I entered the water I could feel my body react to the electrical shock of that liquid mass.

It was late afternoon by the time I reached Cape Comorin, at the very foot of India. From there Rama had crossed over to Ceylon with the

monkey Hanuman, to rescue his wife, Sita, and from there the Aryans had embarked on their conquest of Ceylon. In their invasion they had been helped by a Dravidian chieftain from the south of India, who had thus played in historical fact the role Hanuman had played in legend.

Cape Comorin marks the juncture of three great seas: the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Sea of Bengal. I sat on a rock and looked out over the waters as the brilliant red sun colored the sea. Holding my head in my hands, I thought of how so many of these legendary actions were disappearing from the world. The very scenes which I have been observing and describing in this narrative will shortly become nothing more than a dead legend. Engines and airplanes and bridges will completely overshadow the supernatural powers of Hanuman, who centuries ago flew from Cape Cormorin to Ceylon. Moreover, the atomic era with its interplanetary travel will make my trip to the Himalayas seem petty and insignificant, and my account of these adventures will be as out of fashion as the stories of nineteenth-century travelers are today.

Yet even though I may seem backward-looking and antiquated, I believe I should present this account of what I have seen and felt, because I think it will be of some use to generations far in the future. This book is written, therefore, for those few people who in some future generation may want to search again for the secret footprints which connect the Andes with the Himalayas, even though at that future time they may find nothing in India which in the least resembles what I have recounted here. But these external facts are not important, for the true sense of the adventure and of the trip is purely interior.

The River

From the heights of the Himalayas I descended to Cape Comorin, and I found that there were temples at both extremes. I came from the sanctuary of Siva at Amarnath to Cape Comorin and the temple of Kanya Kumari, the Virgin Princess.

We may find these temples within our own bodies, because everything in the body is sacred. We should erect temples in every part of our bodies to the gods which reside there: we should deny nothing. On the contrary, we should unite everything and live in every part; we should become priests of our own rites and of our own lives, and we should live our lives with a sense of liturgy and cult, and be Brahmans in our own temples.

We must do all this because the Universe has the shape of a man's body. What is below is also above; what is in Anda, or in the cosmos, may also be found in Pinda, or man. For this reason this trip, like all trips, is at once interior and exterior.

I watched the dawn break over Cape Comorin in the company of a group of wailing untouchables, and of a half-naked woman scratching her wounds. The rising sun shone over all of us in our miseries, and it also glistened on the walls of the temple of Kanya Kumari, the Virgin Princess.

Then I bathed in those sacred waters, along with the fishermen and the pilgrims who had come from distant places. I entered the waters of those three ancient seas as though I were entering a sacred river.

Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti is the Messiah whom Annie Besant, the founder of the Theosophical School at Adyar, proclaimed for our era. He may be considered the Bhagavan Mitra Deva of Theosophy. There can have been no more terrible destiny than that of being chosen as a Messiah by the theosophists. This traumatic experience made him react against all teachers and *gurus*, and against all types of imposition. Yet Krishnamurti has been an extraordinarily valuable example to the world because he resisted the supreme temptation of power and wealth, and he renounced all that might have been due him as a Messiah. He continually resisted the adoration of psychopaths, most of whom were rich and idle, the sort of people who go about the world, anxious to throw themselves at the feet of the first semidivine figure they encounter.

Almost all of Krishnamurti's acts have of necessity been negative and renunciatory. He dissolved the Order of the Star in Holland, he publicly declared that he was not a Messiah, and he became the mortal enemy of all teachers and *gurus* of all schools and traditions, and of all philosophies and religions. He has gone about the world demolishing everything and rebelling against everything; he has been like a destructive Siva, performing his great dance in order to prepare a new creative vacuum.

I remember my first meeting with him. It took place just before I came to India. I was on an airplane between Paris and London and was reading a book by Krishnamurti, hoping to find some peace and some

release from the memories I was leaving behind. Later on, when I was walking down an empty London street, I saw a bareheaded man coming towards me along the same pavement. I had never seen Krishnamurti before, but I recognized him immediately. We both stopped and grasped each other by the hand. That was all. Years afterwards, when I encountered him again in India, he said he perfectly remembered our meeting in England.

It is said of Krishnamurti that when he wrote his book, *At the Feet of the Master*, which was during the period when he believed in his guru and when he was devoted to Maitreya, his face became so beautiful that it seemed almost divine. This suggests that he was naturally made for love, for surrender, and for obedience. But then he cut himself off from these things and concentrated on following the intellectual path, which is hard and merciless. In Hindu terminology, it might be said that, although he was essentially a Bhakti-Yogi, he tried to transform himself into a Jnana-Yogi. In short, he forced his own nature. Yet it is by no means altogether certain that this change was caused by his childhood trauma.

It is an extraordinary sight to observe Krishnamurti in public. Seated on a podium facing an enormous audience, he dresses as a Hindu and wears an immaculately white *kadhi*. His hair is also white, but there are dark lines on his face which suggest anguish. When he speaks he utters enormous thoughts which seem to have an eternal truth, and which fit into a grand design. His eyes are half closed, and his eyelids are like the stark branches of a tree, silhouetted against a desolate winter dawn. This is what he says:

"There is no Master, there are no sacred books and there is no tradition. Nobody can teach anybody anything. Nobody should listen to anyone else; there is no sense in following."

I am quoting from memory various phrases which I have never forgotten, and which I heard him speak in public lectures in New Delhi.

"The Unconscious and the Conscious exist only in the world of symbols, yet one has to understand them in order to pass to the beyond, and the achievement of this state completely silences the mind. But this is not a state that can be developed, since it is instantaneous and is pro-

duced only momentarily, without any transition or continuity of feeling. In the same way, neither love nor humility can be developed or cultivated.

"The thought creates the thinker; without thought there is no thinker. Yet thought is merely memory or remembrance of the past. One has to free oneself from thoughts and from symbols in order to cease being a thinker.

"The mind cannot function without the brain, but the mind creates the brain.

"The man who wants to make his life eternal, or his love, or his soul, is like a man who builds a small hut on the edge of the river and who refuses to jump into the current of life, which has no end and no beginning. Life has no beginning or end, and neither has the mind. Only if the mind is liberated from thought and memory, and from accepted ideas, can it reach that state which has no beginning or end and which represents the eternal.

"It is all right to look or to contemplate, but to practice concentration of the mind is simply to impose limitations. To repeat *mantrams* or to practice Yoga or other formulas or disciplines is simply to put the mind to sleep. It is easier to take a tranquilizer, and certainly its effect is less costly, and quicker. But who knows how to look today? Who knows how to contemplate? People look, but they see nothing. Who has seen the sky during the monsoon? Who has seen a big tree growing up against the sky? Who has seen a boyish expression on the face of a man?"

When Krishnamurti speaks in this way, he talks like one who has achieved illumination. He talks beautifully, and his words are creative. Here are some more things he said:

"Who listens any more, who listens to his son or to his wife or to his friend? Listening is also an art, and one should also listen to the position of one's own body and to attitudes and gestures, which are the music that life itself makes and which circulates around us.

"Respectability is a sign of mediocrity. To love, or even to kill, is to put oneself wholly into an action and to gain an eternity in the present tense. The notion of fear arises because we are not total: a bit of us

lives in the past, and a part of us in the future. We are divided because we do not live in the present but live in memory and live in the future. The fear of death is not born of death, but is born out of time zones in which we do not really exist. Fear comes especially from memory. We fear death because we remember having seen somebody die, and because we think that we will also have to die. But whoever lives in the present cannot fear death, because he has put himself totally in the act of living. Thus, even when he dies, he will have no fear of death, since in the very act of dying he will have gained totality, perhaps for the first time in his life. This dying person will respond totally to the request; he will give himself entirely, with all of his life, to death. To die like this is an act of love. Indeed, one becomes more in death. For death is beautiful and poetic; it is absolutely different from life, it is the unknown and the unexpected; it is full of possibilities and it is unlike anything that is known in life. For this alone it should be loved. Moreover, it is the end of time. The person who wants to make his ego endure, who wants to perpetuate the 'I was,' the 'I am,' and the 'I will be,' will have a sad death. But the man who thinks without the encumbrance of memory, and who hears and sees in the present, is capable of living in an atemporal sphere which has no beginning or end. Life has no beginning or end, and neither has death."

As I listened to Krishnamurti I wondered whether the day would come when I could begin to love death and to desire it. For most people death takes the form of someone who is beloved. For myself, I doubt whether I shall want to die until I feel death coming in the form of a golden girl or a white flower. Then I will jump into that flower, and that will be death.

Krishnamurti continued:

"None of the fundamental problems of life has an answer or solution. The answer can only be found in the recognition that there is no solution; it is found only in the acceptance and appreciation of the insolubility of the problem. So it is with life and with death."

When I returned from the south of India I met Krishnamurti in Delhi. I heard him give his lectures and sermons, and I also observed

him in discussions when he lost control of himself and shouted like a child. On one occasion I met him alone in his house. He was standing in a small room whose windows opened onto the garden, and I asked him this question:

"Is the act of murder, or the commission of some crime, as pure an act as that of loving?"

"Yes," he replied, "but only insofar as that action leaves no trace on the mind, only insofar as the mind remains untouched by it. For all actions should take place in that way. Indeed, love should leave no traces once it has been lived, or, like a crime, been committed."

I then asked him whether he ever read, and he said that he did not. And as to his dreams, he replied:

"I dream only when I have eaten something heavy. Normally I do not dream because I *look* at the world. When a man looks, with both his conscious and unconscious being, he leaves nothing left over for dreams and for the nighttime. Then he simply rests."

I then asked Krishnamurti: "But what does it mean *to look*? How does one look?"

"Like this," he said. And then he began to look intensely at a flower in a vase that was resting on a table. As I watched him I began to feel that he was emptying himself, and that a kind of atmosphere had grown around him and that flower, and that something was being subtracted from both the flower and himself, meeting perhaps in some other place, but certainly not there.

Then Krishnamurti looked at my hands. As he did so I began to think that I should never get them back, because he had taken them away. Then he smiled with his incredibly beautiful smile.

I then asked him this question: "You say that one does not have to follow a master and that one shouldn't either teach or learn. Then why do you preach and why do you speak?"

He seemed to be taken by surprise, but he answered in this way: "I give my thoughts as a flower gives its perfume. The flower cannot help exuding perfume."

"Tell me," I said, "don't you get tired?"

"Yes, a little."

I then wondered whether the flower grows tired as it exudes its perfume.

We then went out into the garden to take tea. For himself, Krishnamurti drank only some hot water, mixed with honey and lemon. A cat came by underneath the table and Krishnamurti called to it, but the cat continued on its way. As I watched him sitting there, I began to have a great feeling of sympathy for him, for he is an extraordinarily brave man. In short, Krishnamurti is one of the great men of our times. His thought, although he denies it, has its roots in Vedanta philosophy and is in some ways like Zen Buddhism. Nevertheless, it suffers from the expository weakness common with all Oriental thinking, so that when his thoughts are written down they appear to be feeble. Yet Krishnamurti is also a preaching Brahman. He contradicts himself when he preaches that a man should not preach. Yet he does not see this contradiction, for the Indian never sees it. Moreover, he does not care, for his thoughts are not rational: they come from other zones.

For some time now Krishnamurti has not been well, probably because he has come to a wall which he cannot penetrate. As he once found it necessary to renounce his role as Messiah, so he will probably have to make a new renunciation in order to be able to advance, or even to keep on living. He preaches the total abandonment of conventionality; he accepts love and crime, but he himself lives as a traditional Indian from the south. He is a vegetarian who takes honey and hot water and who lives like an ascetic, entirely in accordance with the established pattern of a *guru*, or teacher. I don't know whether he has ever loved in his life, but I am certain that he has never committed a crime.

Now to be able to advance and to flourish, like the rose in his room, he will have to renounce his lectures, or he will have to love or to kill, or he will have to stop being the Messiah which in spite of himself he still is. He will have to become a total man and to descend to the ways of man. In short, it is time for a second renunciation.

Hysteria?

Once again I returned to Old Delhi in order to meet a Chilean friend who was a doctor, and who was passing through India on his way back from Russia. One evening we had a long talk. My friend, who was pacing up and down the room, began by saying that, above all, we had to keep our minds clear. "We South Americans do not belong to this world," he said. "Nor to the civilization of Western Christianity. We are neither native Americans nor Europeans: we are somewhere in the middle. That is perhaps why we can see more clearly than others do. But, first of all, we must understand that the civilization of Western Christianity is definitely dying. There is a good deal of evidence for this in the attraction that is felt for the Orient, since the search for the exotic and for Orientalism is always found in decadent cultures. Another sign is the admiration for primitivism and for nature. For civilization is always an artificial structure, built in opposition to nature. Here in Asia I see primitivism, or, if you prefer, antiquity in everything. We South Americans don't really belong to this world but, since we have pretended for such a long time to be Europeans, we should now turn a little towards the Orient in order to balance ourselves."

He stopped for a moment before continuing:

"The most important thing to remember, I think, is that civilization is a triumph over nature. It is a gesture or a rite. It is also something like the pain that can still be felt in a limb that has been amputated. Since you have lived in India for so long, you probably don't think of

it in this way. But that is not what I want to talk to you about; I want to tell you about my specialty, psychiatry, and about what I have seen in Russia. There they are extending Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes. They don't believe in what the psychoanalysts have called the unconscious, nor do they put much stock in psychic complexes. On the contrary, they attribute mental diseases mainly to environment. If a worker develops symptoms of neurosis or mental exhaustion, his environment is examined and his fellow workers are questioned, in order to discover the cause of his trouble. The extreme solution is to have him moved to another factory. Such treatment as exists is largely based on drugs."

My friend stopped pacing and stood near me, with his hands in his pockets.

"Obviously this method is inadequate, especially since it cannot avoid philosophical questions. But once the weakness of the method is admitted, the problem still remains what to do next. I am certainly not a spiritualist, and I cannot believe that certain physical senses persist after death. In Bombay I visited a modern school of Yoga where the heartbeats of a man were measured while he was in a trance, and where electrocardiograms and encephalograms were made while he was in *samadhi*. What principally impressed me about these experiments was the inadequacy of the means, the hypotheses, and the results. . . . The same is true for the many theories concerning reincarnation. Have you really thought seriously about some of these cases, which are reported here in India, of children who remember their previous lives? One of them concerns a little girl, four years old, who says she remembers the exact place where she had previously been married. Moreover, she was able to provide details of her house and the peculiarities of her husband. Her assertions seem to have been proved by the testimony of her former husband, who is still alive although he is a very old man. Personally, I don't believe that this proves anything, because I have always noticed that these phenomena of metempsychosis are found only in India. That is to say, they are found only in a country which already believes in reincarnation. It may merely be a collective suggestion, or the pressure of the collective mind upon the ultrasensitive spirit of a child, which is usually very receptive. Such things frequently occur in connection with

ideas that are not yet formulated, or with inventions. These too are doubtless products of the collective mind, which only a genius or an inventor can make concrete. But again, such phenomena usually take place only when the psychic atmosphere or the mental climate is appropriate to them."

"Perhaps you are right," I said. "Like you, I don't believe that these phenomena either increase or lessen the mystery of death. For I think of death as being something like the ability to look at one's own body from outside. We are all locked in a big body without any possibility of escape, as in those *Wheels of Life*."

I rose and showed my friend a Tibetan *tanka* which hung on the wall of my room. It showed a *Wheel of Life* placed in the belly of a ferocious demon. I pointed out the concentric circles of this wheel.

"Dying is perhaps simply a movement from one part of the circle to another," I said. "Or, equally possibly, it may be an awakening."

"There may be something in what you say," my friend replied, "for I am particularly concerned with the science of Yoga. The men who developed that science in ancient times must have known something that we have lost. But how could they have known, thousands of years ago, the exact location of the plexuses? If they were right about that, they may easily have been right about other things, about the third eye, for example, and the empty space they claim exists somewhere in the brain."

We then spoke about many other things, but before the end of our conversation I decided to tell my friend about my own intimate experiences, about the vibrations and the feeling of separation from the body which I had experienced. I tried to express myself as clearly as possible. My friend listened patiently to my long narration, and when I had finished he sat down opposite me and looked at me in a curious way. After a long silence, he finally spoke.

"You know," he said, "these are hysterical phenomena. Of course hysteria is only a word. But in the past did you ever suffer some grave illness, or some accident, or something like that?"

For a long time I sat quietly, trying to think and to remember. And I realized that I had had such an experience.

The Brother of Silence

It was during the night when the door of my room slowly opened. A shaft of moonlight played on the floor, and outside I could see the tree-tops moving in the breeze. Then a shadowy figure entered silently and sat down in a corner. He was a strange monk, accompanied by a small dog, and he was wearing a Tibetan silk tunic and an enormous turban. A rucksack hung from one of his shoulders, and he held a pilgrim's staff in his hand.

He sat down quietly, according to the custom of the country, and for a long time we looked at each other in silence. I noticed that he had blue eyes, and that his pale face seemed untouched with age. Then I began to sense what he was saying.

"My name is Sunya Bhai, the Brother of Emptiness or the Brother of Silence. I live in the high country, in Almora, which is the gateway between Himavath and Mount Kailas. I have lived there for many years, and my friends are the Abominable Snowman and, above all, silence. There is nothing like the silence of the Himalayan mountains, nothing like it in all the world. Men talk and speak, but the truth is found only in silence. Recently you have talked a great deal, and you have been wrong in doing so. That is why I have come to teach you the language of silence, and to listen to your silence. I am not interested in what men can say with words; I am interested only in what they can say with their silence. You must realize that men who talk well, and who utter beautiful speeches, usually have a very bad silence. What is really important is silence, for it is a preparation for the Great Silence."

"Yes," I replied, "I have talked a great deal lately, and have spoken haphazardly and pointlessly. Therefore I promise that I will keep silent until I come to see you in Almora. But do you think the Abominable Snowman will let me through, so that I can visit you?"

"That depends on whether you learn the lesson of silence and the language of silence. You are nearing fulfillment. I can assure you of that, for suffering is the best teacher, and you have suffered. Do you know how to get to my place? It is there, up there. . . ."

And Sunya Bhai, instead of pointing outside, up towards the Himalayas, directed his pilgrim's staff towards my own head.

We had talked for a long time, but only in silence, or in the language of silence.

The Pilgrimage to Badrinath

In a final attempt to find the secret Siddha-Ashram in the Himalayas, I decided to go to Badrinath. Up there, in the high Himalayas, there is a temple to Vishnu which is visited annually by Hindus from all over India. Janardana had told me that his Messiah, Bhagavan Mitra Deva, lived in western Badrinath, and I imagined that if I asked some of the pilgrims or travelers I met along the way I might find what I was looking for. It was the best I could do, because the road to Mount Kailas had been blocked. I considered this trip to be my last attempt in a pilgrimage that had already been very long, and which had stretched from the Andes to the Himalayas.

I believe that I am the only foreigner, and certainly the only Chilean, in recent years who has traveled in this area and crossed the so-called Inner Line of the Himalayas, which was established by the British and is still preserved by the Indians for military purposes. It was perhaps for this reason that a special agent of the Intelligence Service was put at my disposal. His name was Nailwal, and he was a member of the Brahmanic caste. I believe he was assigned to me not only to help and guide me, but to observe my actions. Nailwal brought his own cook with him who was also a Brahman, because he was orthodox and could not eat anything cooked by members of another caste.

Our first stop, after leaving Rishikesh, was Kirtinagar, and there we met Indrapalsingh, a young police officer of the area, who accompanied us for some distance. That night we slept in a place called Srinagar. It

was very hot, and we slept in the open air outside our hut. Before dawn I could hear Nailwal saying his prayers and reverently repeating his *mantrams*.

From there to Pipalkoti we accompanied the caravan of Sri Bagchi, who was a Bengali Brahman and deputy magistrate of Pauri, which is the capital of the district. Pipalkoti was decorated with flower arches, and the deputy magistrate was welcomed with ceremonial music. There we decided to stay the night, and were relieved that it was not so hot as it had been below. At the hostel we met a young man who was also traveling through the mountains, in search of his native gods. Although born in the district, he had been educated in England and was an officer in the Indian Navy. He was now returning to his native traditions.

The people of the region seemed very poor. The valleys were barren, and there was little vegetation or farming in the summer, let alone in the winter, when the valleys were covered with snow. On the road between Pipalkoti and our next stop, Gulapkot, we encountered the caravan of Raj Matha of Terigarwal, the Maharani of the district. We met her by a small hut where she had dismounted from her horse to take a cup of tea. She was an extraordinary woman, very religious and sensitive. Until 1953 she had lived in *purdah*, that is to say, she had lived in private apartments behind blinds and bars, and was seen by no one except her husband, the Raja, and her children and servants. In that year, however, her husband died, and from that time onward she led an entirely different kind of life. Elected to Parliament, she represented the whole district and constantly traveled through the mountains to visit her subjects, who are today her electors, in order to find out their problems and needs. The people of the district look upon her as their queen and mother. The Raj Matha told me that she had loved her husband very much, and she spoke nostalgically about life in *purdah*, "where," as she said, "everything was gentle, and time passed like a river, allowing one to realize oneself in its stillness." She traveled every year to Badrinath and Kedarnath, and she told me about the Valley of Flowers, which is off the main route. She said it was full of thousands of beautiful flowers of all colors, growing almost next to the snowfields. She also told me

that a foreign woman had lived there for many years in a cottage she had built by herself. Finally she had died there, among the flowers.

I said good-bye to the Raj Matha, and we continued our climb, finally reaching a pass that bordered a river. There we found a temple dedicated to Garuda, the man-bird or vehicle of the god Vishnu. The place was called Garur Ganga, and pilgrims always stopped there to bathe in the waters. Since only Garuda could give us permission to pass, or take us to Vishnu, we took some small stones from the bottom of the river and offered them with some money in the temple. These small stones are also useful for defense against the poisonous snakes which often dart out from the side of the road.

From there we continued our ascent towards Jochimath, which was our next stop along the way. Frequently we met pilgrims along the road, or others returning from the mountains. I was dressed in an Indian costume so as not to call attention to myself. The pilgrims we met were extraordinary; they wore robes of many bright colors, and their faces were dark or light with resignation or illumination. There were old men, women, and children; one young mother, who was very beautiful and who wore a long saffron robe, carried her small child on her shoulders, while she supported herself with a staff. Her feet were bare, but her face and her hands revealed refinement and aristocracy. Later we met an old man who was being carried in a *dandi*, or litter. The number of his servants indicated that he was a rich merchant. Then I saw a young man who was walking with great difficulty, hobbling along with a staff. One of his legs was swollen and discolored. Nailwal made inquiries of him, and found that he had suffered an accident along the way. Nevertheless, he continued his pilgrimage; his eyes were shining and he ignored his pain.

Here and there along the route were *dharmasalas*, which are a type of rustic hostel built for the pilgrims. They provide certain kinds of merchandise, and men and women fall asleep under their roofs. At one of the *dharmasalas* Nailwal's cook bought some food for his master. I ate some of the tinned goods I had brought with me and which had been so heavy to carry, and also some vegetables and *chapati* which I bought

at the *dharmasala*. I ate alone at the edge of the cliff, because Nailwal was forbidden by his orthodox Brahmanism to share food with me. In Gulapkoti, when we were staying at the hostel, he even went to the extent of facing my chair against the wall, while he himself faced the opposite side of the room. In this way we ate back to back. Nailwal behaved in this way because he believed that the glance of a foreigner, or a man from another caste, was strong enough to affect his food, and poison its spiritual benefit. Nailwal explained that food was very important, because it went directly to the blood and from there to the soul. He said that it therefore had to be cooked with love, and with pure hands and pure thought, preferably by one's wife or one's mother. He explained that the ritual of eating was prescribed in the Vedas, and he begged me not to be offended by his attitude.

That night we reached Jochimath, which was the most important stop along the route. Its name is a corruption of the Sanskrit word Geothir Math. Geothir means *light* and Math *monastery*. Hence it means the Monastery of Light or, more precisely, Monastery of Enlightenment. The place was given its name by Shankaracharya because it was there that he obtained enlightenment while he was climbing towards Badrinath. Shankaracharya, of whom mention has already been made, was one of the great Pandits of India. Born in the south, he began, during the eighth century A. D., the great reform movement of Hinduism, which was in a sense a counterreformation against Buddhism. He was the creator of Advaita Vedanta, which is an extremely monistic philosophy. He also inaugurated the custom of pilgrimages in India which, by encouraging men to travel from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin and vice versa, contributed to India's spiritual unity. Since that time, masses of pilgrims have moved across the face of India, as they used to do in the Middle Ages, when men from all over Europe traveled to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Europe's Romanesque architecture and pilgrims' songs find their counterpart in the stone carvings and sacred hymns of India.

In recent years, however, pilgrimages to Badrinath have changed in character. Moreover, the road has been improved since the time of my visit, and it is no longer a difficult task to reach Badrinath. But when I

went there I had to prepare a whole mountaineering expedition, and instead of going by the easy road, we had to climb up across the highest passes and make our way across deep ravines. All along I had hoped to find out something about the land of the immortal Siddhas and their magic *asrams*, and I asked many pilgrims, young and old, whom we met along the road, if they could give me any information. Nailwal was not sympathetic about my conversations with these pilgrims, and it is very probable that he was growing suspicious of me. He would try every means to keep these extraordinary beings away from me, and he tried to surround me with a wall and to isolate me. Nevertheless, I always broke through his wall, and in the end Nailwal gave up.

As we continued our ascent we heard a sound that was repeated with greater and greater urgency. It was the sound of men shouting, "Jai Badri Vishal!—Glory to the Lord Vishnu, the Creator of Life!" Whenever a pilgrim passed us he would shout, and we would answer him and repeat "Jai Badri Vishal!" As we moved towards the highest land, this shout was repeated in every throat with increasing intensity.

* * *

That night in Jochimath I visited the monastery of Shankaracharya, and found all the monks gathered together in a spacious central hall lighted by torches. There were also some Saddhus and pilgrims, who were on the way to Badrinath. I joined the circle of these monks and began to listen to the chief Brahman, who was telling an anecdote from the life of Shankaracharya. He told of the time when that great wise man had taken part in a dialectical tournament and how he had defeated all his opponents. A woman had then approached him and asked him about sex, and he said that he could not answer her because he had had no experience of it. He then asked her for six months, so that he could prepare his answer. Using the powers of Yoga, he then separated his astral body and made it enter into the body of a dying king, so that it could come to know the intense sexual life the old king had experienced during his lifetime. Finally, at the end of six months, Shankaracharya returned and gave his answer to the woman.

After the chief Brahman told his anecdote, all of the others present made short speeches in turn. When it came time for a young man sitting next to me, who was covered with a heavy blanket, he began to tell of his experiences with abrupt gestures, and in an inarticulate manner. But as he spoke my attention redoubled, for I realized that he was telling of my own experiences. This is what he said:

"Just before morning came, I was overcome by a fainting spell. And then I felt vibrations passing through me until I finally became immobile. Then only with the greatest effort could I begin to move and to escape those vibrations. I did this by trying to get out of myself, out of my own body. Perhaps somebody else had entered into my body in the manner of the story you, Swamiji, told us about the great *guru*, Shankaracharyaji. Finally I was able to overcome this feeling through *tapas* and *pujas*, and through penitence, prayer, and the following of an ascetic life. I made many pilgrimages to sanctuaries and monasteries, and now it has been a long time since that has happened to me."

I was tempted to ask this man if he had not suffered some great illness or an accident. . . .

* * *

The next morning we rose at dawn in order to go to a cave in the vicinity, which was inhabited by a completely naked yogi. When we got there we saw thick smoke coming out of the entrance and could just make out a few hairy and disheveled beings who were covered with ashes and carrying tridents. These were the disciples of the saintly yogi within, and they asked me to pass through. Bending low, and covering my mouth with a handkerchief so as not to choke with the smoke, I entered the cave and found at the back an immobile, shadowy figure. Gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the smoke and darkness, and I was able to make out a figure with long black hair and whiskers, who was covered with soot and ashes and whose fingernails and toenails were so long that they looked like talons. He was completely naked and sitting in the lotus posture. His eyes were wide open and fixed as though they were dead, and they did not move even once, although the

atmosphere was thick with the smoke of burning grass and sandalwood. I looked into his eyes and even passed my hand back and forth in front of them, but nothing happened. They were completely static, and I am sure they would not have moved, and that he would not even have felt it, if a fly or a spider had landed on his pupils. His face had no expression or indication of age, but I was told that he was 180 years old. I tried to stay as long as I could within that smoky cave, but soon the humidity and the smoke became too oppressive and I had to leave.

From Jochimath we continued our climb up towards Pandukechwar. At one point along the road, Nailwal stopped to show me a hanging bridge which stretched across a ravine. He pointed to the other side where the path wound up over a ledge and disappeared. He said that it was the path that led to the Valley of Flowers, and told me of the thousands of marvelous flowers that grew there.

I looked at it and thought seriously of following it. The foreign woman who lived and died there may well have known the great secret and the path towards the immortals. But Nailwal told me that it was still too early for the flowers.

Pandukechwar was the most beautiful place we had encountered in our climb. In the evening I stood outside our hut and looked at the snowy mountains which were already visible around us, and at the river which passed through a ravine down below. The mountains were painted with intense colors, and I began to think that I might be able to discover in these deep glacial hues the brightly colored domes of the eternal city for which I had been searching.

As night fell, the stars began to come out. I stayed out under the sky for a long time, but at last the icy winds began to go through me like knives, and I had to go inside.

* * *

I fell asleep by the fire inside the hut. Clouds of white fog drifted by, swirling into impenetrable thickness and then evaporating into a thin mist. I found myself on a narrow rope bridge, hanging over a ravine. I knew I had to cross it, but as I looked down at the icy current roaring

below, I began to feel dizzy. The pendulum movement of the swaying bridge increased my feeling of vertigo, but finally I reached the other side, and stood on the path that led up the hillside. This path, however, continued to sway as the bridge had done, and I realized that I would have to adapt myself to that rhythmical movement if I was to go on at all, moving on as if I were in a dance, or caught in the movement of some great invisible pendulum. "Here are the vibrations again," I thought. The path continued up the hillside, but as I climbed I began to feel curiously light, so that by the time I reached the top I was walking almost without touching the ground. Then I looked downwards and found a beautiful valley covered with flowers of many colors. I rushed towards it, anxious to dive among those flowers and to lie down in their midst. Almost immediately I was standing among the flowers, but when I looked at them carefully I realized that they were really precious emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and turquoises. Birds and bees with wings of blue stone flew lazily about, landing here and there on the flowers buds. I felt extraordinarily happy, and stopped to gaze at them. I soon lost myself entirely in this silent world, and it seemed to me that I could hear the sound of the emerald flowers as they burst into bloom, and that I could feel ruby liquid flowing under the earth. I also felt I could talk with the birds and the bees with their jeweled wings. I remained there for a long time, resting my head in my hands, and then someone touched my shoulder softly. I looked up and I saw a face that I thought I recognized. It was framed in golden curls. She looked at me with ineffable joy and then she spoke. "I died here," she said. I looked at her sharply and asked her how that could be, since I remembered her dying in our own faraway country.

"This is our true country," she replied, "and the garden we see here exists everywhere. It is the same as the garden of our childhood." She then pointed towards the snowy peaks that enclosed the valley and said: "One day, we shall go there together. But in the meantime, we must make the fiery lilies bloom." Then after a while, she spoke again: "The time has come for us to separate, but first I am going to teach you how to look at the flowers."

The flowers were now no longer made of emeralds and rubies, but were real flowers, as were the birds and the bees which flew about them. We stopped by a rose bush and she said: "Look at those roses. Can you see the way they are moving? They move that way because they know you are looking at them, and they are replying. You may say that it is only a soft breeze, but the rose itself is a flower woven by the wind. As God breathed the breath of life into His creation, so the rose may be a breath of wind that has taken form. The rose moves because it has heard you and is returning your greeting." She then reached out her hand and touched the blossom. "Look how soft it is," she said. "It is like the skin of a child or of a woman. Touch it as if you were touching me."

After a moment she spoke again, and her words were solemn: "But time goes on: the roses open, and then one by one their petals fall to the earth, blending with one another. I know about it, because I also have died. Yet if a flower has received your glance, it will die in a state of grace and in a state of love. The flower will die as a bride."

Then she pointed at another rose bush and said: "But look at these: they have not opened, but have remained as tight little buds clustered along the branch. Their petals have never been brushed by the wind. And when they die they fall to the earth as though they were stones. No one knows why they are so different, and why they have this particular fate. They last longer than the others do, but they never open and never give forth perfume. They may have some secret which permits them to endure, and perhaps that secret is preserved here in this valley. But you will have to choose between these roses, between these two roads. You cannot take both; you will have to decide. Now I think I have taught you how to look at roses."

As she was talking, I knew that she was preparing to leave; I sensed it in her gestures and in her attitude. And then suddenly I realized that she was far away, and I ran after her shouting. "Listen to me," I cried. "Listen to me. In every flower that I have looked into since you died, and in every face that I have loved and have caressed like a rose, in all of these I have found only you there, at the heart, like an unquiet wind from another world."

My voice echoed and came back to me from the mountaintops; it was repeated again and again up towards the icy heights, and the high valleys where the fiery lilies bloomed.

* * *

We left early in the morning, for we were already at the last stage of our pilgrimage. By noon we arrived at Vishnu Pryar, which is a place where two rivers join together. The junction marked the Inner Line of the Himalayas, and the long lines of pilgrims were carefully scrutinized by the police as they crossed over. Once again I met the man whose leg was badly swollen; he was hardly able to crawl, but his eyes expressed an ecstatic joy. He was singing and calling out in a loud voice, "Jai Badri Vishal!" I was moved by pity and admiration, and when I passed by him I also called out, "Jai Badri Vishal!"

Then, after a little while, we were approached by a young man with a pointed beard. He was wearing a fur cap on his head and had a scarf wrapped around his neck. He was also carrying a rucksack, and looked more like a student than a pilgrim. He began to talk, and he told me that he came from Gangotri, which is near the source of the Ganges, deep in the Himalayas. He had crossed over from Kedarnath, which is a sanctuary to Siva built on the other side. He said his name was Om Satchidanand Hari, and that he had originally come from Maharashtra. I should have liked to have talked longer with him, but we were interrupted by Nailwal, who pushed poor Om Satchidanand Hari away from us as though he were a dog.

Nailwal then explained why he had acted in this way. "You cannot trust these people," he said. "Among these thousands of Saddhus there are many who are crooks, escaped criminals, or just hypocrites and idlers who wear the saffron robe of the mendicant monk in order to live off other people and to avoid working. What India needs are workers and soldiers, not these parasites. For every honest Saddhu there are a thousand fake ones.

"Some time ago, when I was in service up here in the mountains, I met one of these fake holy men. He had come to our house, and my wife gave him something to eat at the door. Later on, she discovered that he

had stolen her watch and several rupees. Eventually I found out that he was a criminal and a fugitive from justice. Then there was the case of the famous yogi who came to Badrinath some years ago. He installed himself at the entrance of a cave and remained there for a long time. He wouldn't move, even if it snowed or rained. Gradually the faithful began to visit him and give him food. This man had his extravagances, but they were accepted since he was supposed to be a holy man. Then one day he overreached himself. He had asked for mother's milk, that is to say, for woman's milk, maintaining that it was the only food he could consume. Some devout women brought him their milk in big bowls, but this so-called holy man refused it and said that he had to take the milk directly from the women's breasts. When I heard about this I went to have a talk with this Saddhu. When I asked him about the incident he denied nothing, but simply accepted it, adding that it was a mystery which I could not understand. I got him out of Badrinath without any scandal." Nailwal then told me about some *ashrams* in the lower Himalayas where the monks live off the credulity of the people and where they have a very good time. "To make up for their misdeeds," he said, "they treat us, the agents of the Intelligence Service and of the District Police, with exquisite courtesy; they praise us and overwhelm us with presents. I understand you know some of those *ashrams* at Rishikesh," he added.

As we continued on during the morning, I kept thinking about that swami who had insisted on drinking woman's milk directly from a mother's breast. It could well be, I said to myself, that Nailwal had not understood, and that none of us is able to understand. In order to reach the top of the Tree or the summit of Badrinath, the roots have to go very deep. In such an adventure, the meaning of everything changes. Anybody can go to Badrinath, and I imagine that Nailwal has been there many times. But there is a difference between going there physically and understanding why one is going there.

The climb became increasingly difficult, and we soon noticed that the river below us was partly frozen. The sky was a cloudless deep blue, and the air was so thin that I began to grow lightheaded, as though I were dreaming. Many caravans passed us by, and it seemed to me that the

pilgrims had come from another universe; their open eyes shone like diamonds and their frosty beards fluttered in the wind like the holy pennants we had seen below. Then we noticed a very old woman who was being carried on a *dandi*. Her head lolled back and forth like a pendulum with the climbing movement. She seemed to be in agony, and the men who were carrying her tried to hurry up towards the top of the pass from which Badrinath might be seen. They wanted to get her there before she died, so that she might be blessed and so that her last breath might be received by Badri, or Vishnu, who is the god of preservation. Behind us came the man with the swollen leg, and I knew that by now it must have become gangrenous. He was supporting himself on his staff with both hands, yet he seemed utterly oblivious of his surroundings: he was impregnated by the cool air of another universe. I decided to stop and wait for him, because I wanted to reach the pass in his company. As I stood by the side of the road, I then saw another man approaching, who was wearing a glistening white cloak. He was half walking and stumbling, and it was obvious that he was exhausted. As he passed by, I could see his dark face and Nazarene beard, and the exhaustion which marked his face. He glanced at me for an instant, and with a supreme effort he smiled. In that brief look, all of human understanding and pain and divine grandeur seemed to be concentrated. He carried no staff, but had a book in one hand. With his other he held on to the rocky ledge at the edge of the path and slowly pulled himself along. I wanted to support him, but I knew that in his shadowy smile he had asked me not to.

By this time the beautiful mother who was carrying her son on her back had also arrived. She was singing with a soft voice, but her feet were wounded and bleeding: they had been destroyed by the rocks and the ice along the way. Her small son looked about him and slowly repeated his mother's name. He was probably very cold and hungry.

Then finally we arrived at the top of the pass, and from every throat came a long screaming shout, which was at once a song and an invocation, and which represented the cry of all humanity at the end of its long hard pilgrimage: "*Jai Badri Vishal! Jai Badri Vishal!*"

From the top of this high pass we could see Badrinath below us, and,

at the side of a gigantic mountain, the Vishnu temple. I was holding my companion in my arms, the man with the gangrenous leg, for he had become my brother. And while the powerful wind bent us over without conquering us, we both shouted towards the heights: "*Jai Badri Vishal!*"

* * *

The great mountain we saw before us was called Nilkanta, and it is one of the most beautiful in all of the Himalayas. Nilkanta means "Blue Point in the Throat of Siva." It was at this point in his throat that the great god of destruction and Yoga blocked the spread of the Serpent's poison, and ever afterwards it was marked on his throat with a black spot. There are two great sanctuaries built at the base of Mount Nilkanta. Badrinath, which we were approaching, was a shrine devoted to Vishnu, while Kedarnath, around the other side of the mountain, was devoted to Siva.

The image which may be found today within the temple at Badrinath is said to be very old. The Swami Janardana, in Madras, asserts that it was placed there twelve thousand years ago by the Supreme Chief of the Great Hierarchy, and that is probably why he believes that the secret abode of the new Messiah, Bhagavan Mitra Deva, who is Vishnu himself, is found in this vicinity. The word *badri* means Vishnu, and *nath*, temple. Nevertheless, some claim that the Badrinath idol is a primitive Buddhist image of the Mahayana sect.

In ancient times Badrinath and Kedarnath were supposed to be closely connected to each other, even though they were on opposite sides of Mount Nilkanta. The same Brahman could officiate in both sanctuaries and was able to travel between one and the other within a few hours. Subsequently, according to the legend, the sins of men provoked a division between the two sanctuaries, so that today it requires many weeks to travel from one to the other. Ida and Pingala have been separated, and no rite can be performed simultaneously at the two *nadis*. The secret paths of communication have been lost.

In the evening after our arrival we went to visit the Badrinath temple. The porch of the temple was occupied by many people who spent the

summer there, and even in the winter, when everything is covered with snow, a number of yogis remain on, or live in some nearby cave. A little food is kept for them in the ice, and there they remain in meditation, generally without any clothes at all and without lighting a fire.

A little farther away, on the other side of the temple, were a number of hot sulphuric springs. When I went to look at them I saw a swami arrive, who was carrying a musical instrument. He took off all his clothes and entered the steaming springs. He was the well-known Swami Pearvatikar Beena, who had maintained a total silence for six years. He only plays his *beena*, which is a stringed instrument, and from time to time he pronounces the names of God and the syllable OM.

From there, Nailwal took me to visit another swami who lived in a high cave, halfway up a sheer precipice. He remains there throughout the pilgrimage season which, at the time I saw him, was well advanced. His name was Swami Parnamad Addhoot Maharaj, and he sat with his legs crossed in the lotus position on a pile of straw. By his side he kept a pot of ink and a sheet of paper, and when I asked him why he did that, he told me that he used them to write down his dreams.

"Dreams," he said, "prove that another life exists besides this one, and they also prove that life itself is a dream. Usually the most painful dreams seem to be the most real, but then when we wake up we realize that what we experienced was nothing more than a dream, and so we are relieved and happy. The same is true of life, for when we die we shall realize that we have been dreaming, and that our sufferings were not real. We will wake up and be happy in death. Another quality of dreams should also be remembered, and that is that dreams usually make no sense; they are often absurd and the themes are disconnected. But the truth is that life is much the same. Thus it is entirely vain to try to give it some meaning or to direct it. Life is only a little less absurd and disconnected than a dream. The same pattern may continue in death, and it may prove to be only a little less absurd and disconnected than life. Everything is repeated as in a series of mirrors."

After he had spoken, the swami began to nod his head back and forth, and he said nothing more. I myself began to feel cold, for my

thin clothing was from the south of India and I was not able, as Swami Parnamad Addhoot Maharaj was, to produce internal heat.

We then went down by a path cut into the face of the rock, which eventually led us back to the temple. I sat down on the steps and found myself in the company of beggars and sick men, saints and bandits, assassins, magicians, and poets. Nailwal finally left me alone, for as an honest man, and as a profoundly religious Brahman, he had to fulfill his rites in the temple. As I sat on the steps I saw the young man whom we had met along the road, and who had been brushed aside by Nailwal. He came up to me and began to tell me, in an inspired manner, about Gangotri and the sources of the Ganges, and he also told me about the saints and real magicians that he had known there. He then took me by the hand and told me about Kabir, the poet of medieval India. Gazing towards snowy mountains, he recited one of Kabir's poems:

I laugh when I hear
That the fish in the fountain are thirsty.
Don't you know, brother,
That reality is found in your home,
And that when you make a pilgrimage
From forest to forest without aim,
You gain nothing at all . . .
Even if you go from Banaras to Madurai?
For unless you find your soul,
The world will always be illusion for you.
Where is the place
That can quench the thirst of the soul?
Be strong and travel in your body
For only there will your steps be firm.
Consider it well, O my heart,
And stay away from any other place.

The shadows of the temple at Badrinath began to merge with the darkness of the night, and little by little the stars began to brighten the sky.

The road back down from Badrinath was easy, for the slope was relatively gentle. When we reached the intersection where the road from the temple of Vishnu crossed the road to the sanctuary of Siva at Kedarnath, we encountered a caravan of people from Gujerat. Their leader was a man about eighty years old, who ordered us to stop by blowing a tremendous horn. He then stepped forward and told us that he was an Ayurvedic doctor and also a homeopath from Baroda. He also told us that his caravan had come from Kedarnath and that they had brought the fire of Trijuginarain with them all the way from there. They kept this fire alight in a great brazier by constantly feeding it new fuel, and they intended to take it back with them to their own country. The old man explained that the fire had originally been lit in Kedarnath thousands and thousands of years ago in celebration of the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, and that since that time it had never been allowed to go out. With tears in his eyes, the turbaned doctor then touched me on the forehead with ashes produced by this flame and he said, "Within three months all your sins will have been consumed by this fire, and you will be able to realize your greatest hopes and aspirations." He then blew his Olympian horn again, and the caravan began to move.

I remained by the side of the road, considering that fire burning in the place between the eyes. For a long time I thought about it, and then I began to formulate a prayer: "O lord of Yoga, make this marriage fire unite the two sanctuaries of Mount Nilkanta, which are also in my spine, and which have been separated by my sins, so that I may be able to officiate simultaneously in both temples, on the same day, and under the same sun."

* * *

As a result of our long pilgrimage together, Nailwal and I had become friends. He told me that he did not want me to leave the Himalayas without visiting his house in Pauri and meeting his wife and small child. We therefore went down to that beautiful mountain town, which is remarkable for the immense view of the mountains which can be obtained from there. I was deeply moved by the welcome given me by

Nailwal and his family. An orthodox Brahman, he served me special food which had been prepared by his wife. He himself did not eat, but sat by my side with a happy expression on his face and began to speak.

"Life for a Karmayogi, like me, consists in fulfilling one's duty, one's *dharma*. That is enough, for the rest will be done by God, who sees everything. I have now come to believe that it is absurd not to eat with a foreigner or to receive him in your house. I am happy that you are here, that you are being served by my wife and that you are eating lunch under my roof. After all, all men are brothers, and all of us have to suffer and have the same measure of fortitude."

Nailwal then showed me the toys which he had brought for his child; they were dolls, and he handled them as tenderly as he would his own child.

I often think of this noble friend, this son of India, who was always correct and honest in fulfilling his duties, and who had accompanied me to the high mountains. He had taken a foreigner to the most secret sanctuary of his god, and he had accepted him generously in the chamber of his own soul.

Nailwal lifted his hand and pointed towards the Himalayas, which stretched for hundreds of miles like a chain of white giants or titans across the whole horizon. "We were there," he said. "There, to the left, is Nilkanta, and farther beyond are the Four Pillars of Vishnu's throne."

As I gazed at the clear horizon, I began to think of this extraordinary people which had created a mythology as gigantic as the mountaintops which surrounded their country. These very mountains were united to their soul. One summit was the throat of Siva, another the throne of Vishnu or the abode of their Messiah. Each mountain has its history and is a living symbol. Thus, like most people who look upon nature as something symbolic, they are for ever condemned to the eternal and the unmeasurable. In order to survive in ordinary life, and so as not to lose themselves forever on this otherworldly plane, they have had to create an elaborate structure around them, with the result that they live almost entirely according to formulas and to the prejudices of a stagnant

theocracy. Yet the more narrow their life becomes, the broader is their basis of metaphysical calculation. Lacking any real way to measure the world around them, they are frequently misunderstood. Their only real measurement is the symbolism of their high mountains and their grandiose philosophy, which in turn seems modeled on these summits.

We in Chile also have magnificent mountains, but we have not interpreted them yet, and we have not incorporated them into our souls. We have not discovered the gods and titans which the Hindus have found in the Himalayas. Yet the same divine force which has been found in the mountains of India may also be discovered in the rocky *cordillera* of the Andes.

The World through a Crystal

It would be impossible to leave India without speaking of Sister Raihana. I was first taken to see her by the Brother of Silence, Sunya Bhai. Sister Raihana is a member of a very old Mohammedan family from Hyderabad, but she believes in reincarnation and reveres Krishna. Like Kabir she is a Sufi, and because of her Mohammedan origin she has much more individuality than the ordinary Hindu. I cannot imagine her being burnt to ashes on a sandalwood pyre; on the contrary, I think she will gain eternity in her own physical form. Although she asserts that she has five thousand lives, my own belief is that she is here in the world for one life only.

I can still see her as she came to me one day when I was sick. I had been suffering acute pain, and not even the strongest sedatives seemed to be of much help. Raihana came into the darkened room, sat down, and began to sing. Her voice was very beautiful and soft, and she sang old Sanskrit verses and ancient *mantrams*. I was literally enveloped by her enchanting music, and soon I began to go to sleep, and the pain left me.

When I awoke I found that she had left me a magic crystal. I gazed into this crystal, which seemed to have the light of the sun reflecting on its face, and as I stared into its intricate interior, I felt that it contained all of the Universe within it. All of the galaxies and stars seemed to glisten there. As I gazed into this crystal, I thought of the whole evolution of Indian philosophy, from extreme dualism in which the Self, or

Purusha, never meets Matter, or Prakriti, to the other extreme of Vedantic monism, in which everything is one, and only Illusion or Ignorance gives the appearance of reality to multiplicity.

Gazing into the depths of Sister Raihana's crystal, I seemed to recall some writings in Vedic script:

"Then there was neither what is, nor what is not; there was no sky, nor a heaven beyond it. What then served as a covering? The waters of the abyss?

"Then there was no death, and therefore nothing was immortal. There was no light between night and day; the One simply breathed by itself without breathing. Beyond that there was nothing.

"In the beginning all was darkness; all was a sea without light. Then the germ that was covered by the husk was born and became One through the power of heat.

"Then came love, which embraced all things. It was a seed which blossomed in the Mind. Only poets who have searched in their hearts have been able to find the bond which connects what is and what is not.

"The ray of light then shone over all, but no one knows where it came from. There was simply willpower above, seeds and self-creating forces below.

"But who in truth really knows how all this came about? Who projected the ray of light, and where did creation come from? The gods only came after creation. Therefore they cannot know the source of creation.

"From whom, then, did this creation come? Was it made or not made? Perhaps the great seer, in the highest of all heavens may know; but perhaps he does not."

It is possible that God is simply an unconscious being who has created the world in His dreams and in His nightmares. Everything comes from those unconscious waters, but no one knows how or why. The ancient Vedic poets could not explain it, and it may be that God cannot explain it either. Perhaps it is then our task to help the Creator

awake from His nightmare and to lighten the darkness. If God cannot help us perhaps we can help Him, and in the process recover our lost totality.

As I gazed into the deep crystal, which was at once clear and shadowy and full of moving lights, I seemed to discover the face of Sister Raihana merging with that of the Brother of Silence at the bottom of the stone. Both seemed to be crossed by the ancient river of creation and by the waters of mystery, and I seemed to hear them say: "Do not speak; do not ask questions. Wrap yourself in the silence of your heart, *for it is there, and only there, that poets have been able to find the bond which connects what is with what is not.*"

The Return

The Master Fights the Serpent

I returned to my own country and my native city, and after a while I decided to visit the Master. As I climbed up the long stairway that leads to his place, I looked at the pictures he had drawn which hung on the wall, and the paintings of Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar. I thought of myself as I had been many years before, and how the Master had started me on my long pilgrimage.

When I arrived I looked at the Book of the Order. It was open, and I could see my name written there, and the names of all my brothers who also served the Master. Alongside the book lay a great sword. Glancing at my Master, I suddenly felt very alone, as though, by the force of my own will, I had remained forever outside of these mental creations and archetypes. The Master was bent over a piece of paper upon which he was writing, and I realized that he must be more than eighty years old. He was writing verses, and he did not interrupt his work when I arrived. He had never written poetry before, but as he had stopped living in prose, he had subsequently submerged himself entirely in the rhythms of cosmic poems.

Finally he stopped and glanced in my direction. When he saw me he looked immensely happy. "Did you meet the masters on Mount Kailas?" he asked me with eagerness.

"I was not able to, Master, and I am not even sure that they exist."

"Faithless man! Now I know that you have fallen and that you have given yourself over to passions and to the life of the world," he said.

"So that the branches of a tree may reach heaven, its roots must reach hell," I replied.

"No," he said. "You are quite wrong. What you renounce in this world is transformed into superior values in your soul. The love which you renounce here is returned to you there in its pure and eternal form. In this world we grow old and die; there you grow younger and younger. All life that you renounce here on earth is transformed into true life in the beyond; everything that you accept here becomes corrupt and dies. You cannot burn a candle at both ends: if you do you will get no light, but only fire and smoke."

"Master," I replied, "I will burn myself like a candle at both ends, and I will remain stretched between heaven and hell—because I am not interested in being anything more than a man."

"You have indeed fallen," he said sadly. "But even now there may be a last chance for you. Listen now, I want to tell you something that will really touch your soul: you can't get away from your essential being and from the depths of your heart. Do you know who exists in the depths of your heart? Christ. And do you know what Christ is? He is renunciation; and only in renunciation will you attain happiness."

After that, the Master did not listen to anything more that I said. Instead he began to sing beautiful old songs of other times and places.

Then I shouted to him, even though I knew he would not listen. "Yes, Christ! But my Christ is the Christ of Atlantis!"

*The Three Evenings
of Ice*

First Evening: The Abominable Snowman

I tried to make my mind blank and struggled against hundreds of ideas and memories which swirled around me. Gradually my mind became calm and then, for a moment, it attained complete quiet. I tried to gaze at the space between my eyebrows and then found that my mind was held there and paralyzed. I don't know how long this lasted, but I felt a soft current running through my body, gradually chilling me from my feet upward. Soon I felt the shape of my body changing, and I thought that I was floating, or that I had become dissolved. My shoulders seemed to extend sideways, and my head fell onto my chest; I felt a pendulum movement, but it seemed to be without form or shape. Rather than feeling free, however, I felt myself a prisoner. Suddenly able to hear with extraordinary acuteness, I listened to the noises of the external world and of objective reality, while at the same time sensing the subjective phenomena which were gaining reality within me. These two sensations struggled against each other, and I seemed to be pulled from one to the other, without finding the key.

Then suddenly, and without any warning, I heard an acute whistle, and realized that someone was at my side. I was so frightened that my hair stood on end, and my whole body was electrified. Although I could see no one, I knew I was in the presence of the Abominable Snowman. Somehow I understood what he was saying, even though I could hear no words. What he said was something like this: "You have arrived at last, or at least you have reached this point. Many

others have come, but I do not see them any more than they see me, although they sometimes discover my footprints in the snow. These are the explorers, who are people that go everywhere and climb mountains, without really going anywhere, without really climbing anything. But your case is different: you will have to struggle with me throughout a whole night. Only I can open the pass to you."

Frightened to death, I struggled all that evening with the Angel.

Second Evening: The Last Flower

I was unable to find the key, and so, sitting again, I tried to go back in time to the Valley of the Gods. Again I experienced the vibrations, the fainting spells and the feeling of cold ice on the spine. Then I found myself paralyzed and caught like a prisoner between two universes in a moment of pure emptiness and supreme anguish. I knew then that I had already gone very far, and that I had reached the point of no return. I knew that if I could not find the way out, or the key, I would be lost forever and I would die. I felt I had lost all control and that I was completely immobilized and outside the world, lacking the ability to return to my body although not really being outside it. The event I had so much feared had taken place. I knew I could no longer depend on myself, but realized that I was an image of destiny and that I could do nothing but wait for it to be fulfilled. The key seemed to be lost forever, and I could not remember how I had opened the door before.

At that moment I wanted to convince myself that I was listening to a voice, receiving thoughts formulated by somebody else. I knew there was somebody else there, even though I could see no one. So I spoke to myself as if it were that other being who was speaking to me, as I had always dreamed she would speak at that very moment. And although it was I who spoke, I convinced myself that it was not me. And she or I then said:

"Look at this flower, here, in my hand before you. Leap, jump into it and remain there!"

And then I jumped, letting go of myself and entering into the flower. At last I had found the key and was free!

Finally I had got out of myself, and I saw my pale, stationary body. She was in front of me, and I was within the flower in her hand. She then spoke. "'Once I taught you how to look at the flowers, and now I will teach you how to listen to them. For they are your own flowers, since you have always had the garden within yourself. Let us go into this garden then and listen to its music!'"

And soon I began to hear the cosmic music which was nothing more than the music of my own flowers, or lotuses, in my garden. Everything began to vibrate in unison, and with her I went jumping from flower to flower, and from petal to petal. We went very deep and also very high, and, although we went hand in hand, I knew that in reality I was within the very small flower in her hand.

Third Evening: The Mystical Death

Since I was in her hand, or within the flower in her hand, I suddenly began to see, as she raised her hand to smell the perfume, an immense head. As the hand was raised, the head grew to a gigantic size and seemed as big as the world. Then she put the flower in her mouth, and I found myself torn to pieces by her teeth so that nothing of myself remained, and I was turned into a digestible paste, as edible as a lotus seed.

I was killed by love.

The Void

One of my egos had died, and so a wedding had taken place. Nevertheless, I was there as I had been before; I had returned to my ordinary size and was standing with my dead companion of the Valley of the Flowers. We were both of the same human size, but we were also somehow *changed and different*.

Slowly I began to climb, and finally, in the midst of the high mountains, I found the Face of the Betrothed which is also the Face of the Brother of Silence.

